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Augusta A. Dawkins

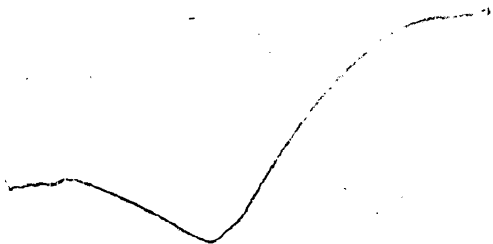
1818.

This was my poor dear Sister's
book. given her by Papa..

1805
=====

Mary C. S. Dawkins

1875.



THE HISTORY
OF
BRITISH BIRDS:

ILLUSTRATED BY
TWELVE COLOURED ENGRAVINGS

OF
BIRDS, THEIR NESTS, & EGGS.

BY THE AUTHOR OF
THE HISTORY OF DOMESTIC QUADRUPEDS.

London:
PRINTED FOR RICHARD PHILLIPS,
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By C. Squire, Furnival's-Inn-Court.

1807.



THIS WORK is dedicated to those good and humane Children, who are satisfied with the Contemplation of the Beauties of Nature, and who never disgrace themselves by robbing birds, some of its most interesting Objects, of their Eggs or their Young: a Practice which is as much a Proof of a bad Heart, as the Forbearance and Reprobation of it are Proofs of an amiable Disposition.

BRITISH BIRDS.

THE distinguishing characteristics of this class of animals are, that their bodies are covered with feathers, that they have two legs, two wings, and a hard bony bill, and that the female is oviparous, or produces eggs.

Birds are unquestionably the most beautiful of the animated tribes, and from them man has nothing to fear. They embellish our forests, they amuse our walks; while their pleasures, their notes, and even their animosities serve only to enliven the general face of nature, and to cheer the contemplative mind.

In no part of the animal creation is the wisdom of the Supreme Being more apparent than in this. Birds, by their structure and their habits, are admirably adapted for the station they are destined to fill. To compensate their want of strength, they are supplied with swiftness; and in order to avoid those enemies which they are not fitted to oppose, they are endow-

with the faculty of ascending into the air. They appear, indeed, to be entirely formed for a life of escape, every part of their anatomy being calculated for swiftness; and as they are designed to soar on high, all their parts are proportionably light.

Though, in the scale of nature, it must be allowed that birds are inferior to quadrupeds, as being less capable of imitating human endowments, less powerful, and less useful, yet they certainly far surpass fishes and insects, not only in the mechanism of their bodies, but in their superior sagacity, and aptitude to receive instruction.

In proportion as animals are more perfect, the species are the fewer. The varieties in the human race arise rather from food and climate than from nature; of quadrupeds, the kinds are pretty numerous; birds are more various still; and fishes yet more; while the insect tribes are so immensely extended, that they elude the researches of the most inquisitive.

Between quadrupeds and mankind there is some distant resemblance in their internal structure; but in this

respect, birds are entirely dissimilar. Formed principally to inhabit the empty regions of air, all their parts correspond with that design; their bodies being sharp before, in order to facilitate their passage through the yielding element, swelling in the middle, and terminating in expansive tails, which serve to keep them buoyant, while their foreparts are cleaving the air. For this reason, they have not inaptly been compared to a vessel making its way through the waves; the trunk of the body of the animal answering to the hold, the head to the prow, the tail to the rudder, and the wings to the oars.

The position of the feathers of birds, lying over each other, and arranged from the forepart backwards, wonderfully contribute to assist them in cutting their way through the air; and for the purpose of yielding warmth to the body, a short, soft down fills up all the vacant spaces between the shafts of the plumage. Their elevation from the earth is also aided by their bones being hollow, and consequently light; and that they may have every facility for rising, their heads are generally

small, their necks long and flexible, and the body sharp on the under side, and flat or roundish on the back.

The wings, again, by which they obtain a progressive motion, are so constructed that, in striking downwards, they expand greatly, while the muscles that move them are exceedingly large. Hence, when a bird intends to rise from the ground, it takes a leap, stretches its wings from the body, and strikes them downwards with such force, that they are put into an oblique direction, partly upwards, and partly horizontally forwards. This process is repeated, according to the pleasure of the bird, which can, without difficulty, rise or fall, retain its equipoise, or turn to the right or the left.

The centre of gravity in birds is somewhat behind the wings, which is the reason that most of them, in flying, thrust out their head and neck. In the heron, however, whose head and neck are long, those members are always contracted in flight, or they would overbalance the rest of the body, while the long legs are extended to maintain an equipoise.

Another instance of the wonderful economy of nature may be perceived, in that wise provision which is made to preserve the feathers of birds from violent attrition against the air, or injury from the moisture of the atmosphere. For this purpose, they are furnished with two glands behind, containing oil, which they occasionally press out with their bills, and spread over such parts of their plumage as require smoothing. Poultry, however, which live principally under cover, and seldom expand their wings in flight, have a smaller quantity of this fluid than such as frequent the open air. The feathers of a hen, for instance, are pervious to every shower; but those of a swan, a goose, a duck, or other kinds of aquatic fowls, are dressed with oil from the very first day that they leave the shell; and hence their flesh sometimes contracts a very rank flavour from it.

All the senses of birds, except that of tasting, seem to be very acute. The sight and the smell, in particular, are exquisite; and to guard the eye from external injury, there is a nictitating or winking membrane, which can at pleasure be drawn over the whole organ of sight.

That no part of the globe might be destitute of such an elegant addition to its scenery, birds are found, in some one or other of their tribes, to be adapted to every climate. Some species, indeed, are confined to particular countries; others are widely diffused; and many migrate, at particular seasons of the year, either from a defect of food, or the want of a secure and suitable asylum for their young. These annual migrations they generally perform in large companies, following some chosen leader during the day, and making a continual cry in the night, that they may not divide.

Of those migratory birds which may be considered as indigenous, the swallow tribe, the goat-sucker, the cuckow, the nightingale, the wheat-ear, the red-start, the land-rail, the quail, the fieldfare, the red-wing, the woodcock, the snipe, the hern, and the Royston crow, are the most remarkable. The retreat of some of those has been well ascertained; of others, the observations of nearly two thousand years have not been sufficient to remove the veil of mystery which hangs on this part of natural history.

Though the notes of each species of

birds have been observed to be nearly uniform, yet experiments show that they are less innate than acquired. A common sparrow, taken from the nest when very young, and placed near a linnet and a gold-finch, adopted a song, which was a mixture of the notes of both its instructors. On the other hand, three nestling linnets, educated, one under a sky-lark, another under a wood-lark, and a third under a tit-lark, forgot the song peculiar to their own species, and adhered entirely to that of their respective tutors.

The music which fills the groves during spring, generally proceeds from the tuneful throats of the males, and is expressive of love and endearment to their mates. Among our most distinguished British woodland songsters, in order of merit stand the nightingale, the sky-lark, the wood-lark, the tit-lark, the linnet, the goldfinch, the chaffinch, the greenfinch, the hedge sparrow, the aberdavine, the red-pole, the thrush, the blackbird, the bullfinch, the red-start, the robin, the wren, the reed-sparrow, and the black-cap. Some of these bear the preemi-

nence in mellowness of tone, others in sprightliness, in plaintiveness, in compass, or in execution; but in all these respects, the nightingale remains without a rival, and may (justly) be stiled among birds, the queen of harmony. The music of the feathered choirs, however, almost universally ceases about the end of June, though some resume their song in autumn, and a few cheer the gloomy hours of winter with their melody.

All birds are oviparous, or produce eggs, from which their young, after a certain period of incubation are extruded. These eggs differ in the different species, both in number, figure, and colour. In them are contained the nidiments of the future animal, for the maturation and perfecting of which by incubation, a bubble of air is always placed at the large end, between the shell and the inside skin. From the warmth communicated to this confined air by the sitting bird, its spring receives an extraordinary increase, and at the same time its parts are put into motion by the same cause. Hence pressure and motion are communicated to the substance of the egg,

which in some unknown manner gradually promote the formation of the young, till the appointed time of its exclusion.

The use of that part of the egg, called the treadle, is not only to retain the different liquids in their proper places, but also to keep the same part of the yolk in one uniform position, whichever way the egg may be turned. The principle on which it acts may be thus explained: the treadle is specifically lighter than the white in which it swims; and being connected to the membranes of the yolk, at a point somewhat out of the direction of its axis, this causes one side to be heavier than the other. Thus the yolk being made buoyant in the midst of the white, is by its own heavy side, kept with the same part always uppermost.

The nests of birds in general are constructed with abundant art, and adaptation; and in this important concern, both male and female assist. Each brings a share of materials to the place—coarser substances to form the foundation and exterior, and then wool, hair, or the down of animals or

plants, to form a soft and commodious bed for the eggs and future young. In short, the act of nidification is one of those wonderful contrivances of nature that evinces the plastic hand of a creating and superintending Power to no common degree.

Mark it well : within, without,
No tool had he that wrought ; no knife to cut,
No nail to fix, no bodkin to insert,
No glue to join; his little beak was all.
And yet how neatly finish'd: What nice hand,
With every implement and means of art
And twenty years apprenticeship to boot,
Could make me such another? Truly then
We boast of excellence, whose noblest skill
Instinctive genius foils.

But astonishing as instinct is, it never can be put in competition with reason. The reasoning powers are always aiming at perfection, by opening new avenues of knowledge; but instinct is blind, and neither advances nor recedes. Birds of the same species build their nests in the same manner now, as they did a thousand years ago: from experience they gain little or nothing, because instinct alone is their guide, whereas reason makes experiment the foundation of its deliber-

ations, when any thing new is to be attempted, and therefore is perpetually adding something to the collective stores of wisdom.

The grand natural divisions of birds are into LAND and WATER birds, each of which have been subdivided into several orders, or families.

We shall begin with those of the rapacious kind, or birds of prey, the distinguishing characters of which are, that the bill is somewhat hooked; that the feet are strong, and armed with hooked claws, three placed forewards, and one backwards; that the female, contrary to the common course of nature, is both larger and stronger than the male; that she builds her nest in lofty situations, and seldom associates with any others of the kind, except her mate.

The ferocity of the rapacious birds not only renders them destructive to animals of their own class, but frequently extends to their young, which are expelled from the nest, before they are properly qualified to provide for themselves. Hence birds of this order are unsociable, and though they evince sufficient attachment for their

mates, the difficulty of procuring food keeps them from assembling in flocks. Their flesh is lean, tough, and ill-tasted, commonly resembling, in flavour, the animals which they devour; and from their leading a life of hostility, they are shunned by the feathered race in general, while but few of the species are useful to man.

THE EAGLE.

THE eagle is by far the noblest, and the most generous of the rapacious order of birds. On this account it was consecrated by the ancients to Jupiter, while the Persians, and after them the Romans, assumed this bird for their ensign in war.

So great is its native fierceness that it is almost impossible to train it for the chase, though we are informed that the Orientals anciently employed it for that purpose. But its form and its habits seem to disqualify it for being an auxiliary in our sports; and even when deprived of liberty, it must be confined with a chain, or it would be dangerous to those who approach it.

Of all birds, the eagle flies the high-

est in the air, for which reason it obtained the appellation of the "bird of heaven," and the character of being the messenger of Jove. His sense of sight is most exquisite, and therefore he chases by the eye, and darts on his prey with irresistible fury and unerring aim. He easily carries off geese, lambs, and kids; and when he attacks fawns or calves, it is rather to glut himself with their blood, than with the hopes of transporting them, except in fragments, to his nest, which generally serves him for life, unless destroyed, and is formed of such durable materials that it seldom wants repair. It is commonly composed of large sticks, laid pretty flat, on the dry and inaccessible point of a rock, and lined with layers of reeds or brambles. The whole nest is several feet in breadth, and in this the female deposits two or three eggs, which she continues to hatch for thirty days. It is seldom, however, that more than two eaglets are produced. By a wise provision of nature, the more innocent animals are prolific; while the dangerous are marked with certain infecundity. Frequently the eagle does not rear more

than one, from the difficulty of procuring food, and the voraciousness of its disposition, which during the season of incubation is peculiarly great. It is at this season that the eagle spreads devastation among the kids, lambs, and every sort of game. Smith, in his History of Kerry, relates that a poor man procured a comfortable subsistence for his family, during a summer of famine, by robbing the eaglets of the food which their parents carried to the nest; and in order to protract the period of imbecility, and to retard their flight, he ingeniously contrived to clip the wings of the young, by which means his supplies were not soon lost. This, however, was a dangerous undertaking, as will appear from the following narrative of Goldsmith. "It happened some time ago," says he, "that a peasant had resolved to rob the nest of an eagle, that had built in a small island, in the beautiful lake of Killarney. He accordingly stripped and swam in upon the island, while the old ones were away; and having robbed the nest of its young, he was preparing to swim back, with the eaglets tied in a string. But while he was yet up to

the chin in the water, the old eagles returned, and, missing their young, quickly fell on the plunderer, and in spite of all his resistance, dispatched him with their beaks and talons."

Martin, in his history of the Western Isles, records instances of two children having been carried off by eagles at the breeding season; but fortunately the theft was early discovered, and the children were restored unhurt to their distracted parents. It was probably from an incident of this nature, that the fable of Ganymede's being snatched up into heaven by an eagle, took its rise. Eagles seem formerly to have been extremely numerous and destructive in the Northern parts of Britain; for a law is mentioned which entitles a person that kills an eagle in the Orkneys to a hen out of every house in the parish, where the exploit was performed.

The colours of the eagle become stronger and deeper till it has arrived at full maturity; but age, famine, long captivity, and disease whiten its plumage. It is supposed to reach the age of an hundred and upwards, but we have scarcely any authentic notices on this subject. Certain it is that the ea-

gle is naturally a long-lived bird, and that it is no less remarkable for its abstinence than for its longevity. Pennant mentions one in the possession of Owen Holland, Esq. of Conway, which he had kept nine years, and the gentleman from whom he received it, thirty-two. To the latter it had been sent from Ireland, but at what age was not known. The abstinence of this bird was put to a cruel test by the servant neglecting for twenty-one days successively to give it any food.

When tamed, or rather when reduced to a state of captivity, the eagle will eat any kind of flesh that is offered to him, and even devour bread, serpents, and lizards. He generally remains half savage, and will attack dogs, cats, and sometimes men that come within his reach; but though it is rarely that he wholly loses his native ferocity, some instances have been recorded of his docility, his attachment to his benefactors, and his indignant sense of injury towards his tyrants. Of the latter we have the subsequent proof.

A gentleman of the southern part of Scotland, not many years ago, had a fine eagle, which the keeper one day, on some petty offence, thought proper

to lash with a horse-whip. About a week afterwards the man chanced to stoop within reach of its chain, when the enraged animal, recollecting the late insult, flew in his face with such fury and violence that he was terribly wounded, but luckily driven by the blow so far back as to be out of all farther danger. The screams of the eagle alarmed the family, who found the keeper in a woful plight, and the enraged and victorious animal pacing about in the most majestic manner. Each was anxious for his own safety, lest in his rage he should break loose; and they had no sooner retired, than he snapped his chain, and escaped for ever.

Though their numbers are much reduced, and their haunts more limited than when the country was less populous and cultivated, Britain still produces several species of eagles, some of which we shall briefly particularize.

THE COMMON EAGLE.

This creature, which is frequently distinguished by the name of the ring-

tail eagle, is of a rusty brown colour, with a white transverse band over the tail which sufficiently distinguishes it. It is an inhabitant of Europe, America, and the north of Asia, and is not unfrequent in the Highlands of Scotland, where it builds in precipices and sea rocks, still retaining its original nest, unless dislodged by violence. In the Orkney Islands, a pair of them have occupied the same spot, beyond the memory of man. This species is very destructive among young animals. It is somewhat larger than a turkey cock.

THE GOLDEN EAGLE.

The body of this species is of a dark brown colour, irregularly barred; the tail is black, waved with ash-coloured bars, and the feet are downy, of a rusty yellow colour.

The golden eagle, which is a native of Europe, and is not unknown in some of the mountainous parts of Great Britain and Ireland, measures about three feet in length, and the expansion of its wings is upwards of seven feet. It has been generally considered to bear the

same dominion over the birds, which has been universally attributed to the lion over the quadrupeds. “Magnanimity,” says Buffon, “is equally conspicuous in both: they despise the small animals, and disregard their insults. Both are remarkable for their temperance, and seldom devour the whole of their prey, but leave the fragments to other animals. Though famished, they disdain to feed on carrion.”

The golden eagle builds its aerie in elevated rocks, ruinous and solitary castles and towers, and other sequestered places. Some of its habits have been well described in the following lines, by the poet of nature:

High from the summit of a craggy cliff,
Hung o'er the deep—such as amazing frowns
On utmost Kilda's shore, whose lively race
Resign the setting sun to Indian worlds—
The royal eagle draws his vigorous young,
Strong pounc'd, and ardent with paternal fire;
Now fit to raise a kingdom of their own,
He drives them from his fort, the towering seat,
For ages, of his empire.

THE SEA-EAGLE, OR OSPREY.

The prevailing colour of the sea-eagle is ferruginous; the inner vanes

of the tail feathers are white; the cere is yellow, and the feet are half covered with down. It frequents the Highlands of Scotland and the Orkneys, and in size is not inferior to the largest of the genus to which it belongs. Hence it has often been confounded with the golden eagle, to which indeed it bears a strong resemblance, though its habits are very different.

The osprey feeds principally on fish, which it seizes when swimming near the surface of the water, by darting down upon them; and its talons are perfectly adapted to its way of life. Martin says, that these birds fasten their talons in the backs of salmon, which often rise to the surface of the water, and thus carry them off, and that they also prey on aquatic fowl. It builds its nest on the shore, or on the margins of rivers; and lays three or four white eggs of an elliptical form. Willoughby mentions one that had its acerie in Westmoreland, that soared aloft in the air with a cat in its talons: The resistance of the cat, however, obliged the eagle to descend,

and each of them unwilling to quit its hold, they were taken up together.

THE KITE.

This species is easily distinguished from other rapacious birds by his forked tail, and his slow floating motion. Flying seems his only pleasure: he is seldom at rest, and may be said to spend his life in the air. Sometimes he remains suspended in this element, without any apparent motion of his wings, regulating his evolutions by his tail: he rises without effort, and descends as if he were sliding along an inclined plane. In short, all his motions are calculated to excite admiration; yet with all this facility in flying, he seldom chases, nor is there a bird that cannot easily make good its retreat from him by swiftness. He may therefore be considered as an insidious thief that prowls about in quest of easy prey. When he finds a bird wounded, or a young chicken that has strayed too far from the parent hen, then the kite seizes the hour of calamity; and, like a famished glut-

ton, is sure to shew no mercy. Hence he is to be seen in the vicinity of cottages where poultry are kept; and of all winged animals, he is one of the most unpleasant neighbours.

Formerly kites were kept in France for the entertainment of the royal family, by their combats with the sparrow-hawk, or falcon, before which, though so much smaller, they would fly in the most dastardly manner, rather vanquished by their own fears than the force of their enemy.

Kites usually breed in large forests, or in woody mountainous countries. They are about twenty-seven inches long, and the expansion of the wings is nearly five feet. Lord Bacon observes, that when this bird flies high, it is a presage of fine weather. It continues in this country during the whole year, and is by no means uncommon.

THE COMMON BUZZARD.

This well-known bird is about twenty inches in length, and four and

a half in breadth. His body is brown, the belly a pale colour, with brown spots, and the cere and feet are yellow.

The buzzard is of a dull and indolent disposition, and hence its name has been used as a term of reproach for such among the human race as are supposed to resemble it in those respects. It will continue perched for many hours together on a tree or other eminence, from whence it darts upon such prey as comes within its reach. It feeds on birds, mice, reptiles, and insects; but though possessed of strength and agility, it will fly from a sparrowhawk, and when overtaken, will suffer itself to be beaten, and even brought to the ground without resistance.

The buzzard is so far capable of being tamed, as to be rendered a faithful domestic. We read in Buffon, that a bird of this description was so docile, that it came every night to sleep on its master's window, constantly attended him at dinner, sat on a corner of the table, and very often caressed him with its head and bill, emitting a weak sharp cry, which it could soften at pleasure. One day it fol-

lowed its protector, who was on horseback, flying above his head, for upwards of two leagues. It shewed a marked aversion both to cats and dogs, and in its contests with them always came off victorious. We are told likewise that it had a singular antipathy to a red cap on the head of any of the peasants, and that it would frequently whip them off, to the astonishment of the wearer.

The buzzard is one of the most common of its tribe in this country. It breeds in large woods, generally fixing on an old crow's nest, which it enlarges and lines in the inside with wool and other soft materials. It feeds and tends its young, which seldom or never exceed three in number, with great assiduity. Ray assures us, that should the female be killed, during the season of incubation, the male buzzard will undertake the charge of rearing the progeny, and take care of them till they can provide for themselves.

THE GOSHAWK.

Among the predaceous tribes of birds, the kite and the buzzard are

reckoned ignoble, while the falcons and hawks, from their high spirit and greater docility, were once held in vast esteem, and contributed in no small degree to the amusement of our ancestors. The diversions of mankind, however, varying according to their different stages of improvement from rudeness to civilization, hawking is now little practised in this country; and we feel little interest in birds which were formerly bought at a great price, and which are still highly valued in other parts of the world, where they constitute the principal amusement of men of rank. On the coast of Barbary, among the Arabs, in India, Persia, and Japan, hawking is said to be cultivated above every other sport; and in Britain, some centuries ago, a nobleman scarcely ever stirred from his house without a hawk on his arm. In those days it was thought sufficient for the youth among the grandees to wind the horn, to carry the hawk fair, and to leave study and learning to people of meaner condition. In every country of Europe, indeed, falconry was in such high estimation, that Frederick, one of the emperors of Ger-

many, did not think it unbecoming his dignity to write a laborious treatise on the subject.

The game-laws, which took their rise in times of feudal tyranny and barbarity, and are the last bulwark that seems to resist the encroachments of freedom, were peculiarly favourable for the encouragement of hawking, which at once displayed the pride of the rich and the slavery of the poor. In the reign of Edward III. it was made felony to steal a hawk, and to take its eggs, even in a person's own grounds, was punishable with imprisonment for a year and a day, besides a fine at the king's pleasure. Elizabeth reduced the period of imprisonment to three months; but the offender was to find security for his good behaviour for seven years, or lie in prison till it was procured. "Such," says Pennant, "was the enviable state of the times in England. During the whole day, the gentry were employed with the fowls of the air or the beasts of the field. In the evening they celebrated their exploits with the most abandoned and brutish sottishness. At the same time, the inferior ranks of people, by

the most unjust and arbitrary laws, were liable to capital punishment; to fines, and to the loss of liberty, for destroying the most noxious of the feathered race."

This amusement, however, cost very dear, and in the ruin it sometimes occasioned, justice was satisfied for the arbitrary principles with which it was secured. In the reign of James I. Sir Thomas Manson is said to have given a thousand pounds for a cast of hawks, an astonishing sum, if we consider the value of money in that age.

Among those falcons anciently trained to the chase, the goshawk was in considerable estimation, and was trained principally to pursue cranes, geese, pheasants, and partridges. It is distinguished by having a brown body, the tail feathers barred with pale bands, a white line over the eye, a black cere, and yellow feet. It builds its nest in lofty trees; and darts on its prey with vast impetuosity; but if the object of pursuit eludes its first attack, it almost immediately desists, and perches on some bough, till fresh game presents itself.

THE PEREGRINE FALCON.

The peregrine falcon is still used by the few gentlemen who delight in hawking, and its swiftness and its spirit are excellently adapted for the purpose. The body is ash-coloured above with brownish bands, reddish white below with blackish bands; the tail is spotted with white, and the cere and feet are yellow.

This species breeds among the rocks of Llandidno in Caernarvonshire, which have long been famous for producing a generous race. In the north of Scotland it is very common. Its flight is inconceivably rapid. One of them that had been trained by a gentleman in Angus-shire, having escaped from him with two heavy bells appended to each foot, was killed in less than two days afterwards, at Mostyn in Flintshire.

THE HEN HARRIER.

This species is about seventeen inches long, and the expansion of the wings is three feet. The bill is black, the cere yellow, the upper parts of the body are of a bluish grey, and the

under parts white. The eye-lids are yellow, and an arched line surrounds the throat.

The hen harrier frequents forests, heaths, and other sequestered places, especially in the neighbourhood of marshy grounds, where it destroys numbers of snipes and other birds that are fond of watery situations. Indeed it is very destructive to every kind of bird, and in particular to young poultry. It breeds on the ground, and generally skims the surface of the earth in search of its prey, which includes every animal it can manage.

A bird of this kind that was shot some years ago near London, was first observed dodging round the lower parts of some old trees, and now and then seeming to strike at their trunks with its beak and talons, but still continuing on the wing. After it was killed, the reason of this manœuvring was accounted for: on opening its stomach near twenty small brown lizards were found there, each of which it had torn into two or three pieces.

These birds breed on the Cheviot hills, and usually produce four at a time.

THE SPARROW-HAWK.

This elegant and docile bird has a green cere, yellow feet, a white belly undulated with grey, and the tail marked with black bars. The male is about twelve inches long, and the female fifteen.

The sparrow-hawk possesses great intrepidity and sagacity, and commits numerous depredations among the young poultry of all kinds, from which it is not to be deterred, even by the presence of the human race. Still it is one of the most tractable and affectionate birds of its race. "I very well remember," says a naturalist, "that when I was a boy I had one that used to accompany me through the fields, catch his game, devour it at his leisure, and after all find me out wherever I went; nor after the first or second adventure of this kind was I ever afraid of losing him. A peasant, however, to my great mortification, one day shot him, for having made too free with some of his poultry. He was about the size of a wood pigeon; yet I have seen him fly at a turkey-cock, and when beaten, return to the

charge with undaunted intrepidity. I have also known him kill a fowl five or six times as big as himself."

This bird may be trained to hunt partridges and quails. The female builds in hollow trees, rocks, or lofty towers, and generally lays four eggs.

THE OWL TRIBE.

THE characters of this genus are, that the bill is hooked and covered at the base with bristles; that the nostrils are oblong, the head, ears, and eyes very large, and the tongue cleft.

Owls are nocturnal birds, and therefore pursue their prey only by night. They feed principally on small birds and quadrupeds, but have no objection to insects, when they cannot procure more desirable prey. The exuviae and bones of what they devour are always discharged by the mouth, in the form of small pellets, and hence their nests are frequently filled with an immense quantity of such materials.

Destined to seek their food by night, the eyes of owls are so constructed

that they see much more distinctly in the twilight than in the broad glare of day. They are not only capable of shutting out or admitting light as their necessities require, in common with many other animals; but they have also an irradiation in the back of the eye, which materially contributes to their vision.

Ill adapted either to procure subsistence or to avoid danger in the full blaze of day, they generally keep concealed in some obscure retreat, suited to their gloomy habits, and there continue in solitude and silence, till the shades of night begin to fall. If accidentally dislodged, or tempted by famine to venture abroad in the sun, they appear dazzled and distracted. Legions of little birds flock round them, and, taking advantage of their confusion, treat them as objects of contempt and derision. The black-bird, the thrush, the bunting, the redbreast, the sparrow, and even the smallest and most timid birds that wing the sky, unite their feeble powers to insult and abuse the intruder on the realms of day. They utter their discordant notes around

him, flap him with their wings, and; like other cowards, pretend to be bold; when they know their danger is but small. The owl, unable to see his way, and confounded by the number of his foes, patiently suffers all their indignities with the most sovereign stupidity and indifference. The appearance of an owl by day is sufficient to set the whole grove in an uproar. Sensible that he is their natural enemy, and aware of the season of security, the smaller birds pursue him with unceasing activity, and lend each other courage in the general cause. Bird catchers taking advantage of this singular propensity, having first limed some of the outer branches of a hedge, hide themselves near the spot, and by imitating the cries of the owl, collect a number of birds together, in hopes of finding their accustomed game, and thus make them an easy prey.

All the owl tribe, however, are not equally overpowered by the light of day. The great owl of North America takes considerable flights, and is sometimes seen chasing his prey successfully under the sunshine; but though the generality of owls are incapable of

this, nature has compensated for their defect of sight by a peculiar quickness of hearing, which is almost unequalled in the feathered race.

The head of the owl is round, and formed somewhat like that of a cat, an animal which in its general modes of life it strongly resembles. Its note is either the object of mockery or of terror. The screech owl alarms the weak and the superstitious, and its voice is considered as the presage of calamity or death; while the hootings of the common owl commonly excite ridicule or contempt.

In winter, owls mostly retire into holes in towers and old walls, and pass that season chiefly in sleep. We have several species in this country.

THE GREAT HORNED OWL.

The body of this species which in size equals some of the eagles, is of a tawny red colour, marked with lines and spots elegantly varied. The wings are long, but the tail is short, and marked with transverse dusky streaks.

It inhabits inaccessible rocks and

desert places, throughout most parts of Europe, Asia, and America, and preys on hares and feathered game. It has occasionally been shot both in England and Scotland; and was anciently so common in Greece, that it was considered as the favourite bird of Minerva. The Athenians, indeed, seem to have been free from the popular prejudice which most other nations appear to have entertained, and to have considered owls rather as objects of veneration than abhorrence.

The great horned owl sees better during the day than almost any other of the tribe. The attachment of the female to her young is most extraordinary. A Swedish gentleman having taken a young one, put it up in a large hen-coop, and next morning a partridge was found lying dead before the door of its prison, which had been brought by the dam, which had discovered its abode. The practice was continued for a fortnight, and every day, some kind of bird or animal was brought for the support of the captive. At length the attentions of the parent ceased, probably because they were not supposed to be longer want-

ed. Indeed, after a certain period, all birds abandon their young to their own exertions.

THE LONG-EARED OWL.

This bird is distinguished by its six auricular feathers, which rise above an inch in length, variegated with black and yellow, and which it can raise or depress at pleasure. The breast and belly are of a dull, yellow colour, and the back and coverts of the wings are varied with deep brown and yellow.

The long-eared owl, which is a large and solemn looking bird, is found in the North of England and in Wales. It breeds in the caverns of rocks, the hollows of trees, or the turrets of some deserted castle. Its nest is almost three feet in diameter, and is composed of the fibrous roots of trees, lined with leaves. The young, which are commonly three in number, are extremely voracious, and the parent is particularly assiduous in supplying their wants. It is a very clamorous bird.

THE WHITE OWL.

The white owl is almost a domestic bird, frequenting churches, barns, old houses, and uninhabited buildings, where it rests during the day, and at night issues forth in quest of food. It is extremely useful in destroying mice. A single bird of this kind being supposed to be more serviceable than half a dozen cats, in clearing barns of vermin.

At the commencement of twilight, it generally quits its hiding place, and takes a regular circuit round the fields, skimming along the ground, in search of its prey. Sometimes when it has satisfied its appetite, it will, like a dog, hide the remainder of its meat. It appears to have some selection in its choice of food; for though it will strike and kill the shrew-mouse, it will not deign to taste it.

The elegance of this bird's plumage sufficiently compensates for the uncouthness of its form. A circle of soft white feathers surrounds the eyes: all the upper parts of the body are of a fine pale yellow, variegated with white

spots, and the under parts are entirely white. The legs are feathered down to the very claws. The common length of the owl is fourteen inches, and the expansion of the wings three feet. It seldom hoots, but snores and hisses in a violent manner, and when it flies along, often screams most tremendously. It makes no nest, but deposits its eggs, generally five or six in number, in the holes of walls, or under the eaves of old buildings. The male and female alternately sally out in quest of food for the young, seldom being absent more than five minutes at a time. It is with difficulty brought to bear confinement, even though taken when young.

The Mogul and Kalmuc Tartars pay almost divine honors to the white owl, for its being accidentally the cause of the preservation of Jenghis Khan, the founder of their empire. That prince being once defeated and compelled to seek concealment in a copice, an owl settled on the bush under which he was lying, and his pursuers thinking it impossible that a bird would perch where a man was concealed, gave up the search, by which

means the hero escaped, and recovered his lost fortune.

THE SCREECH-OWL.

This species has an ash-coloured body, the breast and belly are yellowish, marked with white and narrow black strokes pointing downwards. It is sometimes called the ivy-owl; and from its being supposed by the superstitious to presage death, its cries are heard with terror and alarm, and indeed it has frequently been noticed to scream near the chamber of the sick, allured perhaps by the light of the candle or lamp. The ancients likewise believed that it sucked the blood of young children, and in fact, we learn from Hasselquist, that there is a Syrian owl which frequently enters houses in the evening, and destroys infants when asleep. It preys on any kind of flesh.

GREAT SHRIKE, OR BUTCHER-BIRD.

In the shrike tribe, which is sometimes referred to the rapacious order

of birds and sometimes to the pies, the bill is strong, straight at the base, and hooked or bent towards the end; the upper mandible is notched near the tip, the base wants a cere, and the tongue is jagged at the end. The outer toe is connected to the middle one, as far as the first joint. They seem to unite the rapacious birds with the pies, and are the inhabitants of every quarter of the world, and are found in all climates, except within the arctic circle.

The great shrike is about ten inches long and fourteen broad. The upper parts of the plumage are of a pale ash colour; the wings and tail are black varied with white, the breast and belly are of a dull white, and the legs are black.

The bill, which is black and about an inch long, is furnished with very thick and strong muscles, by which means the bird is enabled to kill its prey with facility. It seizes the smaller feathered tribes by the throat, and strangles them, from which habit it has obtained from the Germans the title of the "Suffocating Angel." When its prey is dead, it fixes it on a

thorn, and then tears it to pieces with its bill. Even when confined in a cage, it will frequently stick its food against the wires, before it is devoured.

The butcher-bird, during spring and summer, is said by Latham to possess the faculty of imitating the voices of other birds, by which means it decoys them within its reach. At other seasons, it retains its natural note, and if caged, though apparently contented, it is alway mute. In a word, the instinctive habits of the shrike are truly wonderful, and though contemptible in appearance, it is one of the greatest tyrants of the air. It is rarely seen, however, in the cultivated parts of our island, inhabiting only the mountainous wilds, among furze and unfrequented thickets.

The female builds in trees, and lays six eggs of a dull olive green, spotted at the end with black. The young at their first exclusion from the egg are fed with caterpillars and other insects, but as they acquire strength, they are accustomed to flesh; nor are they driven from the nest when they can provide for themselves, but the

parents and the brood form only one family, hunting together, and dividing the spoil with great peace and amity.

These birds are supposed to live to the age of five or six years, and there is a strong prejudice entertained in their favour, from an idea that they destroy rats, mice, and other vermin.



THE CROW TRIBE.

THE crow genus is distinguished by a strong bill, the upper mandible a little bent, the edges sharp, and in general a small notch near the tip. The nostrils are covered with bristles reflected over them, the tongue is divided at the extremity, the toes are formed for walking.

These birds are very generally diffused over the world, some of them being found in almost every climate. They are extremely prolific, clamorous, and some of them fond of associating in flocks. Most of them build in trees, and produce five or six young at a time. They feed promiscuously on animal or vegetable substances, and have been proscribed by ignorance,

from a supposition that they devour much corn; but the fact is, if they occasionally consume a little grain, they amply compensate for this, by the immense quantities of insects which they destroy, that would otherwise prey on human labour, without making the smallest return.

THE RAVEN.

The raven is black, its back a glossy bluish colour, and its tail nearly rounded. Its length is about two feet, and the expansion of its wings upwards of four.

This species inhabits most parts of the world, commonly frequenting the vicinity of large towns, where it is serviceable in consuming carrion and filth, which it scents at a great distance. It displays abundant sagacity by keeping out of the reach of fire arms; and among the ancients, it was regarded as a bird of augury.

When taken young, the raven becomes very familiar, and his busy, inquisitive, and impudent disposition, renders him very amusing. He goes

where he pleases, affronts and beats off the dogs, plays his tricks on the poultry, and is particularly assiduous in conciliating the good-will of the cook-maid, who is generally his favourite in the family. But with all his pleasing qualities, he has also the vices and defects that arise from perverseness indulged. He is a glutton by nature, and a thief by habit. • He does not confine his depredations to what he can eat, but he purloins what he can never enjoy; a piece of money, a teaspoon, a ring, or any other trinket is always a tempting bait to his avarice; and if he can carry them to his hole, he seems to exult in the exploit. A gentleman's butler having missed several silver spoons, which gave him much uneasiness, at last detected a lame raven carrying one to his hiding-place, in which upwards of a dozen more were discovered.

A popular respect is still paid to the raven in all countries, probably originating from its being appointed by Heaven to feed the prophet Elijah. This prepossession in its favour is very ancient, since the Romans, from a principle of superstitious fear, treated it

with profound veneration. According to Linnæus, the Swedes never attempt to molest it.

Pliny informs us that a raven, which had been kept in the temple of Castor, flew down into the shop of a taylor, who, pleased with his visitor, taught him several tricks, and in particular to pronounce the names of Tiberius and the whole royal family. The taylor was beginning to grow rich by the concourse of people who came to see his bird, when a neighbour, envious of his prosperity, slew the raven, and deprived him of all hopes of farther improving his fortune. The Romans, however, punished the offender, and honoured the bird with a magnificent funeral.

The female builds her nest in trees and in the holes of rocks, in which she lays five or six bluish green eggs, spotted with brown. She sits about twenty days with the utmost perseverance, and during this period the male supplies her with food. Nothing, indeed, can prevail on her to quit her station. White mentions a raven, which sat on her nest till the tree in which it was built was felled to the

ground, when the poor bird became a martyr to her parental affection.

The raven will feed on any kind of offal, but when that is scarce, will destroy rabbits, ducklings, chickens, and even lambs when they are weakly. He will sometimes eat the eggs of other birds; and though his flesh is rank and nauseous, is himself eaten by the natives of Greenland.

Ravens generally fly in pairs. Their croaking note is well known.



THE CARRION CROW.

This bird is less than the raven, but in colour, form, and many of its habits, closely resembles it, living in pairs, feeding upon putrid flesh, and frequently committing depredations without any ostensible object. It will even pick out the eyes of lambs when fresh dropt; and in a rabbit warren, it is peculiarly destructive.

The female builds her nest on trees, and lays five or six eggs, sitting with the same perseverance as the raven, and like her, being fed by the male.

The carrion crow has been seen to

strike a pigeon dead from the top of a barn. It is so bold a bird, that neither the kite, the buzzard, nor the raven, dares to approach its nest; and when it has its young to maintain, it will attack birds of powers superior to its own.

Dr. Darwin says he once saw on the coast of Ireland, above a hundred crows preying on muscles, which they raised a considerable way in the air, and then letting them drop on the stones, broke the shell, and got possession of the animal.—It is related that a certain ancient philosopher, walking along the sea shore to gather shells, this bird mistaking the bald head of the sage for a stone, dropped an oyster upon it, and at once killed its prey and the man.

Formerly crows were so numerous in this country, that an act of parliament was passed for their destruction. In a domestic state he is capable of being taught to articulate several words with considerable distinctness.

THE ROOK.

Among all the various notes of animated nature, few are more soothing

to the mind, or more pleasing to the imagination than the cawing of rooks. Though the single voice of a rook is entitled to little praise; yet, when he sings in concert, which is his chief delight, an harmonious whole is produced, and we listen with pleasure to the chorus.

This species is about the size of the carrion crow, but its plumage is a more glossy black, and the forepart of the head is somewhat ash-coloured. It is still farther distinguished from the crow, however, by its social habits, and by its modes of living.

Rooks subsist chiefly on worms, insects, and grubs, and therefore may be regarded as very useful assistants to human industry. They will, indeed, devour corn, or other kinds of grain, when they experience a scarcity of their favourite food; and hence they are proscribed by selfish ignorance; but without them, the harvests would frequently fail, as has been proved in Suffolk and some parts of Norfolk, where the grub of the cock-chaffer destroys the roots of corn and grass to such a degree that half a crop would not be produced, were it not for the instinctive diligence of these birds.

In England, rooks remain during the whole year, but in France and Silesia they migrate; and it may be reckoned a singular circumstance that none of them are found in Jersey.

With us, it is well known that the flocks of them which are sometimes assembled, darken the air in their flight. They build their nests on high trees, close to each other, and when they have once formed a colony, they constantly frequent the same place, repairing their old nests, early in the spring, and seldom suffering intruders to come within the limits of their domain. Indeed, though they are naturally gregarious, they are often bad neighbours to each other; and in order to finish their own nest with as little trouble as possible, frequently plunder the sticks that compose another's.

As soon as the nest is completed, the male begins to feed the female, and this gallant deportment is continued, during the whole season of incubation.

The conflicts which take place sometimes between rooks themselves, and sometimes between them and other kinds of birds are truly astonishing, but it would occupy too much space

to record them. A few years ago, a remarkable contest happened at Dalham Tower in Westmoreland, between a colony of herons and another of rooks, which built in two adjacent groves. Peace and harmony long prevailed, but the grove occupied by the herons being at last cut down, they thought they had a right to share the remaining one in the possession of the rooks, and accordingly began to claim a part. For two seasons, the war was carried on between them, the one to establish a new right, the other to repel invasion: many lost their lives on both sides, but victory at last declared in favour of the herons. On this, a peace seems to have been concluded between them, as the two communities live together in harmony, each confining itself to a particular portion of the grove.

When the first brood of rooks are sufficiently fledged, they all quit their nest-trees during the day, in search of food, but return regularly every evening to sleep. Indeed nothing can be more delightful than to see the congregating of these birds before dusk, and the various evolutions they perform in their return, and to hear their

united notes, which seem to be poured out as the evening service of gratitude to the Almighty Parent of All. The following imagery is just:

Returning from the downs, where all day long
'They pick their scanty fare, a black'ning train
Of loitering rooks thick urge their weary flight,
And seek the shelter of the grove.

THE JACKDAW.

The jackdaw is a lively, loquacious bird, possessed of great sagacity, and capable of very strong attachment. It is of a very brownish black colour, the hind part of the head is hoary, the front, wings, and tail are black. It is very common in this country, where it remains the whole year, though in some parts of the continent it is migratory.

This bird frequents old towers and ruins, in considerable flocks, where it builds its nest and rears its young. Sometimes, however, it has been known to build in hollow trees near a rookery, and to join the rooks in their foraging expeditions. In Hampshire, where

there are few towers or steeples, they have been known to occupy rabbit holes; and in short, they are not unacquainted with the art of availing themselves of local circumstances, in every situation.

They feed principally on worms and the grubs of insects, but will not refuse grain or any kind of flesh. They are tamed with great facility, and prove very entertaining inmates. With little instruction, they may be taught to pronounce several words, and even sentences, with great distinctness of articulation. The writer of this had a favourite jackdaw that regularly attended at the window as soon as breakfast or dinner was brought in, to receive his allowance, and whenever he had an opportunity, he would enter the room and hop about in the most familiar manner. He had been taught to cry "halt! dress! eyes right!" and "poor jack!" and as he was generally perched near a public road, some laughable incidents arose from his proneness to repeat what he had learned. At last he was unfortunately drowned in a bath into which he had ventured to wash himself, and there was scarcely

a dry eye in the family, on witnessing "poor jack's" catastrophe.

The jackdaw has a native propensity to hide what it cannot eat, and it will carry away pieces of money or toys, which sometimes gives rise to suspicions against the innocent.

THE JAY.

The jay is one of the most beautiful birds that frequents our woods. Its back and breast are a delicate cinnamon colour, the coverts of its wings are blue barred with black and white, and on the forehead is a beautiful tuft of white feathers streaked with black, which it can erect at pleasure; but notwithstanding its external elegance, its note is harsh, grating, and unpleasant.

The jay feeds on acorns, nuts, and all kinds of fruit, not excepting those which are cultivated in gardens, where it is sometimes an unwelcome intruder. It builds an artless nest in trees, in which it lays five or six eggs. The young continue with the parent birds, till next pairing time, when each chuses his mate, and separates, in order to form a new colony.

When domesticated, the jay will become very familiar, and will catch and repeat a variety of sounds. One of them has been heard to imitate so exactly the noise made by the action of a saw, as to induce strangers to believe that a carpenter was at work. Another, kept in the north of England, had learned, at the approach of cattle, to set a cur dog on them, by whistling and calling him by name. An accident, however, happening to a cow, in consequence of this propensity, the poor jay was complained of as a nuisance, and accordingly was dispatched.

THE MAGPIE.

This well known elegant bird is variegated with black and white, and has a wedge-shaped tail. Like the crow, it feeds on almost every kind of vegetable or animal substance. It builds its nest with great art, covering it entirely with thorns, except a small hole for admittance, and lays six or seven eggs.

The magpie, in a tame state, is a familiar bird, and may be taught to

pronounce not only words, but short sentences, and even to imitate any particular noise that it is accustomed to hear. Plutarch informs us, that a bird of this kind, belonging to a barber at Rome, was such an adept in the imitative art, that it got through all the repetitions, stops, and changes of the trumpet.

In Norway, where its appearance is not common, its sight is esteemed ominous. Indeed, in various parts of England, the vulgar have prejudices concerning it. A single magpie is thought a sign of ill luck ; two, of good fortune ; three, of a funeral ; and four, of a wedding.

Like all the rest of its tribe, the magpie is addicted to stealing ; and when satiated, will frequently hoard up its provisions. It is a mischievous bird in farm yards and rabbit warrens.

THE CORNISH CHOUGH.

This bird, which sometimes receives the appellation of the red legged crow, is of a blackish mixed with a violet colour, and its bill and feet are red.

It affects mountainous and rocky situations, and builds its nest in high cliffs or ruined towers, laying four or five eggs. In our country it frequents some places in Cornwall and North Wales, inhabiting the cliffs and ruinous castles, along the shore. A few are found on Dover Cliff, where a pair sent from Cornwall escaped, and have since stocked the spot, but do not appear to be much attached to it.

The Cornish chough is an elegant and tender bird, and unable to endure severe weather. In its disposition, it is active, restless, and meddling; charmed with glittering objects, and very apt to snatch up bits of lighted sticks, by which means houses have sometimes been set on fire. It commonly flies very high, and makes a very shrill noise. In Cornwall, it is nothing unfrequent to see them running about the gardens of the peasantry, in the most tame and familiar manner. They shew a great degree of attachment to their protectors, but will not allow a stranger to touch them.

THE CUCKOO.

This singular bird has obtained a name in all languages, taken from the sound of its voice, which is familiar in almost every country. In Europe, however, it is a bird of passage, or at least it disappears early in the summer, and is seldom seen or heard again, before the middle of April.

The cuckoo is rather an elegant bird, both in its form and colours: it is blackish, in general spotted with white, and the tail is rounded; but it is its natural history which interests us the most. Vulgar credulity has ascribed to it numerous qualities which certainly do not belong to it; and yet some of its habits are sufficiently extraordinary without the addition of fiction.

It is believed, and on good authority, that this bird builds no nest of her own, but deposits her solitary egg in that of some other bird, by which it is hatched. For this purpose she generally selects the hedge sparrow, the water wag-tail, the titlark, the yellow hammer, and the whinchat; but it has

been observed that she gives the preference to the former.

Dr. Jenner, who has since so much distinguished himself by introducing vaccine inoculation, some years ago threw much new light on the œconomy of this singular bird. He observes, that while the hedge sparrow is laying her eggs, the cuckoo contrives to deposite her egg among the number, leaving the future care of it to the foster-mother. When the period of incubation is past, and the young are excluded, the hedge sparrows are soon turned out by the spurious progeny, and then the young cuckoo becomes her sole charge.

It sometimes happens that the eggs of two cuckoos are deposited in the same nest, and in that case, a violent contest is sure to arise which shall retain possession; for it seems instinctively ordered by nature, that only one bird shall remain in the nest; and though the cuckoo can easily manage to turn out the young of the hedge sparrow, or of other small birds, it must try its strength, before it can dislodge one of its own species.

Instances, however, have been re-

corded of the cuckoo building a nest and rearing her own young; and, perhaps, both modes may be occasionally practised.

Before the cuckoo retires, it becomes mute, and the place of its retreat has been as much disputed as the manner in which it is bred. The prevailing opinion is that it emigrates; but others maintain that it lies in a torpid state during the winter, in hollow trees. Willoughby supports this latter hypothesis, by informing us that some old willows being cut and put into an oven to heat it, the people were astonished with the sound of "cuckoo, cuckoo!" issuing from the place. On examination, it was found that a cuckoo had been awakened by the heat of the oven, and we are told it was kept alive for two years afterwards.

The young cuckoo may with care be brought up pretty tame, and rendered familiar. It is then fed with bread, milk, eggs, fruits, insects, or meat; but in a state of nature, it is supposed to live chiefly on caterpillars.

The subsequent extract from a beautiful ode to the cuckoo, by Loggan, is

64 THE COMMON WOOD-PECKER.

admirably descriptive of some parts of its natural history.

Hail beauteous stranger of the grove!
Thou messenger of spring!
Now Heaven repairs thy rural seat,
And woods thy welcome ring.
What time the daisy decks the green,
Thy certain voice we hear;
Hast thou a star to guide thy path,
Or mark the rolling year?
Delightful visitant! with thee
I hail the time of flowers;
And hear the sound of music sweet,
From birds among the bowers.
What time the pea puts on the bloom,
'Thou fliest thy vocal vale;
An annual guest in other lands,
Another spring to hail.
Sweet bird! thy bower is ever green,
Thy sky is ever clear;
Thou hast no sorrow in thy song,
No winter in thy year.

THE COMMON WOOD-PECKER.

The singular race of birds called wood-peckers live almost entirely on insects, which they pick out of the bark and intestines of trees, by means of a long bony tongue, barbed at the end, and furnished with a curious apparatus of muscles, for projecting it with

great force. Their toes are placed two forward and two backward, which fit them for climbing, and the tail consists of ten hard, stiff, and sharp-pointed feathers. They make their nests in hollow trees, and are altogether an innoxious tribe,

The common wood-pecker is, perhaps, one of the most beautiful birds in our sylvan scenes. Its prevailing colours are greenish on the body, but the crown of the head is crimson. Its length is about thirteen inches, and the expansion of the wings twenty-one.

This species, by means of its bill, makes holes in trees as regular, as if bored with an auger. It feeds oftener on the ground than the rest of the genus, is very fond of bees, and lays five or six eggs. It has obtained the appellation of the rain-fowl, from a particular cry it makes before a change of weather.

THE NUTHATCH.

In its general habits, the nuthatch nearly corresponds with the wood-pecker, and in its formation it is not very different, except that it has three

toes placed forward, and only one backward. The only species known in this country, and indeed in Europe, shows a predilection for nuts; and hence its English name. All the upper parts of the body are of a bluish grey, the breast and belly are orange, and the tail is black and short.

This bird is about five inches long: it is shy and solitary, frequents woods, and amuses itself by running up and down trees. It feeds on caterpillars, beetles, and other insects, as well as on nuts. The manner in which it cracks the latter is extremely curious: it places them in some crevice or chink as in a vice, and then standing over them, soon makes a perforation with its bill. While at work, it makes a rasping noise that may be heard at a considerable distance; and sometimes by inserting its bill into a crack in the bough of a tree, it will produce a sound as loud as if the wood was rending asunder. It utters its note in the night, and at the approach of winter draws near to houses and gardens.

The female lays six or seven eggs in the hole of a tree, and performs the office of a very careful mother. She

hisses like a snake if disturbed, and will sooner suffer any one to pluck off her feathers, than she will desert her post.

THE KINGSFISHER.

Of this beautiful genus of birds we have only one species in Britain, the common kingsfisher, which frequents the banks of rivers and small streams, preying principally upon fish, which it catches with great dexterity, sitting patiently on a branch projecting over the current till its game appears. The top of the head and the sides of the body are of a dark green, marked with transverse spots of blue; the tail is a deep blue, and the other parts of the body are dusky orange, white, and black. In short, such an assemblage of gaudy colours are united in no other bird, and its form is sufficiently elegant to set off its plumage. The bill is long and triangular, and the toes are formed for climbing.

The kingsfisher is frequently seen balancing itself over the water for a considerable space, then darting below the surface, and bringing up its prey

in its feet, which it swallows whole, and afterwards disgorges the indigestible parts. While it remains suspended in the air in a bright day, its plumage exhibits a very beautiful variety of the most dazzling and brilliant colours. It makes its nest in the sides of the banks of rivers, which it scoops to the depth of three feet, and lays from five to nine eggs. The nest has a very fetid smell, occasioned by the remains of the fish brought to feed its young.

The kingsfisher, according to M. Gmelin, may be seen in every part of Siberia, and its feathers are employed by the Tartars and Asiatics for many superstitious purposes. In this country, indeed, the vulgar still entertain a belief, that when the body of this bird is suspended by a thread, its breast, by some magnetic influence, will always be turned to the north. It is also thought that its skin stuffed will preserve woollen clothes from the moth.

In all ages some superstition seems to have been attached to the kingsfisher, and the marvellous has been plentifully mixed with its history. The ancients believed that it possess-

ed the property of calming the waves of the sea, and that it built its nest on the foam. Hence a period of happiness and ease is still called *halcyon* days.

THE HOOPOE.

This bird, which is only an occasional or periodical visitant of Britain, is easily distinguished by an enormous tuft of variegated feathers on the crown of its head, which it can raise or depress at pleasure. The back and wings are crossed with broad bars of white and black, the neck is a pale reddish brown, and the breast and belly are white.

The hoopoe is a native of Europe, Asia, and Africa. It feeds on beetles and other insects, and makes its nest of dung, in the hollow of trees, laying two eggs. Disgusting as it may appear from its habit, it is eaten in some parts of Italy. Its note is expressive of its generic name; and in Sweden its appearance is deemed portentous of war, and even in this country it is considered as the precursor of some calamity,

Through the whole of Europe the hoopoe is a bird of passage, except in the mild climates of Greece and Italy. They are seen among those vast crowds of migratory birds, which, twice every year, pass the island of Malta. They seldom perch on trees, or remain long on the wing, but hunt after their prey on the ground.

THE CREEPER.

Birds of this genus are spread over the whole globe, though we have only one species in Britain, which is the least of all our feathered tribes, if we except the crested wren, as it weighs no more than five grains, though the manner in which it ruffles its feathers gives it an appearance beyond its real size. Its colours are a mixed grey, with the under parts of the body white. The tail is long, and consists of twelve stiff feathers, and its feet are well adapted for creeping up and down the stems of trees in search of its insect food; from which circumstance it receives its name. It breeds in hollow trees, and sometimes lays twenty eggs,

This little creature seems to have a particular attachment to human society ; and in some parts of the world it receives an interested protection, from its destroying insects in its vicinity. In many districts of the United States of America, it is usual to fix a small box at the end of a long pole, in gardens and about houses, for the creeper to breed in. There the female is easily induced to build her nest, and to rear her young, for whose support she consumes an immense quantity of insects. A gentleman, who watched the motions of these birds, observed that the parents generally went from the nest and returned with their prey, from forty to sixty times in an hour, and that they were engaged in this business the greatest part of the day. Allowing then that only twelve hours were thus occupied, a pair of creepers would destroy upwards of six hundred insects in a day, on the supposition that they only took a single one each time.

THE POULTRY TRIBE.

IN birds of this family the bill is convex, the nostrils are arched over with

a cartilaginous membrane, and the feet are formed for running, with toes rough underneath. The principal genera are the pheasants, turkies, peacocks, bustards, pintadoes, and grouse. They live chiefly on the ground, scraping the earth with their feet, and feeding on grain and seeds, which are macerated in their crops, previous to digestion. They usually associate in families, consisting of one male and several females; the latter of which makes an inartificial nest, and lays a number of eggs. The flesh is highly esteemed as an article of food.

THE DOMESTIC COCK.

- The cock, "the messenger of morn," is too well known to require any description. He has been so long domesticated that it is impossible to say when he was introduced into Europe, though it is generally agreed on that he came from the East, where the primitive stock is still found enjoying its native independence.

The beauty of his plumage, his undaunted spirit, as well as the various

wants of mankind which he assists to supply, have rendered the cock a favourite in every country. His courage is almost invincible, and with a gallantry, not to be surpassed, he will lay down his life in defence of his hens, which he leads, protects, and cherishes, collects them when they straggle, and seems to feed unwillingly, till he sees them participating in the spoil. An intruder is always attacked with resolution; he can neither bear a rival nor an opponent. On some occasions, he has manifested a kind of jealousy, and shown himself actuated by revenge. The eggs of a partridge being put under a fine hen which was a great favourite of the cock, she brought up the supposititious brood with abundant care, shut up in an out-house, and inaccessible to the other poultry. At last the door of her retreat happened to be left open, and the cock got in, and finding her surrounded with a bastard race, fell upon her with the utmost fury, and killed her.

The native bravery of the cock, indeed, has frequently been perverted to his own destruction, and to the disgrace of the human race. Will it be

believed in future ages, that Christians, men of an enlightened mind, and of high rank in society, should delight in seeing these animals tear each other to pieces? Even Pagans might blush at such inhumanity. The Battle Royal and the Welch Main need only to be named, in order to be execrated. In the former, an unlimited number of cocks is pitted, of which only the last surviving bird is accounted the victor; so that in case there are sixteen couple, thirty-one must be sacrificed before the combat is decided.

Are these your sovereign joys, Creation's lords?
Is death a banquet for a God-like soul!

It must be confessed, however, that the Sumatrans and some other Oriental nations almost rival the infamy of the English in this barbarous pastime; but it will probably occur to the reader, that they have excuses which will not be allowed to us. In some parts of the East, indeed, they fight their cocks not only for money, but for their wives and children, for their daughters, their sisters, and their mothers. In disputed points, arising from this deep kind of play, four arbi-

trators are appointed ; and if they cannot agree, there is no alternative, but for the parties concerned to fight it out in person. Our cock-fighters seldom have any desire for risking their own lives : the cruel are commonly cowards.

But to return from this digression. Nothing can equal the patience and perseverance of the hen in hatching ; and if the cock is high spirited, as becomes a male, in all the tender offices of maternal love she is perfectly exemplary. So intent is she upon her duty that she neglects, in some measure, her own wants ; and when, after an incubation of three weeks, her young brood appears, from being one of the most timid of creatures, she becomes the most daring in their defence.

The eggs of the hen, which, with proper feeding, she will lay almost at every season of the year ; though she never breeds above twice in that period, are a nutritious and pleasant article of food. Various artificial schemes have been invented for hatching eggs, without the assistance of the hen ; and in Egypt they are said to be peculiarly successful, by means of heated ovens, in which it has been com-

puted, that a hundred millions of chickens are annually produced. The practice has been introduced into France, and has likewise been attempted in Britain ; but the trouble and expence have been found to exceed the profit.

THE COMMON PHEASANT.

This very beautiful bird, which has long been partially reclaimed, but seems incapable of being absolutely domesticated, is said to have been originally brought from the island of Colchis, by the Argonauts. Except the peacock, the pheasant has the most elegantly variegated plumage of any of the gallinaceous tribes ; and the male is much more splendid in its colour than the female.

Persons of fortune are fond of stocking their woods and plantations with the pheasant, and in this climate it seems to require the protection of man. In a state of nature it subsists on grain, berries, and herbage, nestles on the ground, and lays from twelve to fifteen eggs. Being a heavy bird, it takes but

short flights, and of course would never have been able to reach remote islands and continents, had it not been imported on purpose. In some parts of America, it has been propagated by the Spaniards, but it was not originally a native of the new world. Its voice bears a near resemblance to that of the common cock; and its flesh has always been considered as a peculiar delicacy, on which account it is protected, by the game-laws, and therefore seldom falls to the lot of any, except the great, and the different kinds of vermin; which latter come in for more than a full share.

THE TURKEY.

The turkey has a caruncle on the forehead and on the throat, and on the breast of the male is a bristly tuft. The tail is broad and expansile, the bill short and strong, and the colour dark brown, mixed or barred with white.

No ancient author mentions this bird; and as it does not appear to have been known in Europe before the discovery of America, there is strong pre-

sumption that it came from that country. It is difficult to rear with us ; yet it stands the cold of a Canadian winter in a state of nature, and affords much pastime to sportsmen. It is hunted with dogs, which for a time it outstrips, but being at last tired, it takes shelter in a tree, where it sits in stupid indifference, till the hunters come up, and knock it down with a pole.

Though naturally arrogant and impetuous when they can intimidate, turkies are cowardly when attacked. The domestic cock will often keep them at a distance, and if he yields, it is rather to force than courage. The turkey cock is remarkable for his gobbling disagreeable noise, and for his blustering disposition ; but like many among the human race, who imitate him in those qualities, he shrinks before genuine resolution, and is only valiant against the unresisting. The hen, in general, is much more mild and gentle, and performs the duty of a mother with the utmost assiduity. She conceals her eggs from the male, who would probably break them, because he is unwilling to be deprived of the society of his mate ; and after an


Incubation of eight days, the young are brought to light, and attended with extreme solicitude. They are very tender creatures, but the flesh of one, when sufficiently grown, is so highly esteemed, that no pains are spared in rearing them.

In a wild state, turkies are gregarious, and sometimes weigh forty pounds. The American Indians make an elegant kind of cloth of their feathers,

THE GUINEA HEN.

The guinea hen is a native of Africa, but has long been domesticated in this country. It is known by a double caruncle at the corner of the mouth, and a rounded back. It is a noisy, restless, and turbulent bird ; and though it lays a great number of eggs, it shews little maternal affection, often abandoning its young to their fate. None of its habits indeed entitle it to much respect or attention ; and it is rather kept as a curiosity than for any peculiar good or valuable qualities it possesses. Its flesh, however, is sufficiently delicate,

and preferred by epicures to that of the domestic poultry.



THE PEACOCK.

If superiority were to be acquired by beauty, the peacock would be indisputably the king of birds. On none of the feathered race has nature bestowed a more elegant form, or such richly-coloured plumage. The head is adorned with a fine crest turning forwards, and the feathers of the tail are elongated, broad, expansile, and decorated with eyes, whose lustre no words can describe. In a word, no human art can imitate the vivid tints of this bird's plumage; and as it struts in the sun, every moment produces a thousand shades of undulating and evanescent colours, which are instantly replaced by other tints, always changing, yet ever brilliant.

But as nature was determined to shew of how little value beauty is without merit, it has given the peacock a harsh, discordant voice, and denied it any share of sagacity, further than is necessary for the continuance of its

kind. Though known in Europe ever since the time of Alexander the Great, it is rather kept for shew than use: its flesh is scarcely eatable, and it has none of those qualities when alive that engage affection. It is proud, vain, and quarrelsome, and formed only to captivate the indiscriminating eye. Like all the rest of the poultry kind, this bird feeds on grain, insects, and tender plants. In its appetites, however, it is extremely capricious, and sometimes very mischievous. It will strip the tops of houses of their tiles and thatch, and lay waste the labours of the gardener, by destroying his choicest seeds, and nipping his most favourite flowers. It always roosts in an elevated situation. The female lays five or six eggs in a retired place, which she hatches in somewhat less than thirty days. The young acquire the perfect beauty of their plumage in the third year, and it is supposed, on good authority, that they will live to the age of twenty-five. Aged females sometimes acquire the plumage of the male: the same has been observed by naturalists in the pheasant,

THE GROUS TRIBE.

IN this family are included the different species of grouse, so called, partridges, and quails. The former chiefly frequent cold, bleak, and mountainous tracks of country, and have thin legs, feathered down to the very toes. Partridges and quails, on the contrary, inhabit warmer and more cultivated districts, and approach nearer to our domestic fowls. The flesh of the whole race is brown, but delicious food.

THE COCK OF THE WOOD.

This bird, which is the largest of the grouse kind, and little inferior in size to a turkey, was formerly an inhabitant of the pine forests in the north of Scotland, but is now become rare, and probably will soon be extinct. It is still common, however, on the Alps and the Pyrenees, from whence it sometimes descends into the level country to prey on the corn.

Altogether this is a fine bird, but the two sexes differ considerably in colour. They never pair; but about

the beginning of February the cock, perched on the top of a tree, calls all the females round him by a peculiar loud voice, and his summons is instantly obeyed.

The hen lays on the ground, from eight to sixteen eggs, and when obliged to quit her nest in search of food, she carefully covers them with moss.

THE BLACK COCK.

This species is of a blackish colour, and has a bifurcated tail, the secondary flag feathers being white towards their base. The male weighs about four pounds, and the female half as much.

The black cock frequents heaths and woods of birch and poplar, and during winter, often buries itself in the snow. It is found in particular parts of the New Forest in Hampshire, where it is preserved as royal game, in Wales, and in the north of Scotland. It feeds on the tops of heath, on acorns, and various seeds; often collects in flocks, and perches on trees. The male is very pugnacious; and during spring, animates the forests by his crowing, which

is the signal for the females to assemble round him. The hen seldom lays more than six or seven eggs, in an artless nest on the ground, and hatches her young very late in the summer.

In the more southern countries of Europe, these birds are very plentiful, and every where are valued for their flesh, and for the sport they furnish.



THE RED GROUS.

The head and neck of this species are of a light tawny red, the back and scapulars are of a deeper tinge of the same colour, and the tail feathers are black.

These birds are not uncommon in the heathy and mountainous parts of England, and are pretty plentiful in Wales and Scotland, but they have not been observed in any of the countries of the continent. In Scotland, they obtain the appellation of moor-fowls.

In winter, they are usually found in flocks of forty or fifty, which are termed *packs* by sportsmen, and are then remarkably shy and wild. They seldom descend into the plains, but live

on mountain berries and on the tender tops of the heath.

In the spring they pair, and the female lays from six to ten eggs in an inartificial nest, on the ground. The young brood follow the hen during the whole summer. The usual weight of the male is about nineteen, and that of the female fifteen ounces. The flesh, as in all the rest of the family, is extremely delicate.

THE PARTRIDGE.

This well-known and highly-valued bird, for whose protection legislators have often sat in deep debate, has a naked scarlet spot under the eyes, a ferruginous tail, a brown breast, and whitish feet. It is a native of Europe and Siberia; but seems to thrive best in temperate latitudes and well cultivated countries, as it subsists chiefly on the labours of the husbandman. In the northern regions, it becomes white during winter; but in every country where it is found, its flesh is esteemed

a peculiar delicacy. Partridges pair in February, and the female lays from fifteen to eighteen eggs in a rude nest formed in the ground. The period of incubation is three weeks, and the young, which are called *covies*, follow the hen for a considerable time, and experience from her the utmost instinctive affection, So attentive is she to her maternal duties, that she has been known to be carried in a hat with her eggs to a considerable distance, and in confinement, to have produced her brood. The young are very fond of the grubs of ants, and the parents conduct them to ant-hills as soon as they are excluded from the shell; and in order to draw off attention from their offspring, will frequently risque their own lives. The partridge, however, is a stupid creature. It will sometimes hide its head in any hole, and leave its body exposed, as if it imagined it could not be seen, if it did not see. If reared by the hand, it soon neglects the feeder, and seldom has been known to remain tame, after it arrived at maturity, or to shew any attachment to the place where it was bred.

THE QUAIL.

The quail has a greyish spotted body, white eye-brows, and the margin of the tail feathers, and a lunated spot on them, are ferruginous. Though it is far more universally diffused than the partridge, it is by no means so common in this country, where it is a bird of passage.

The female lays about ten eggs, and the period of incubation lasts three weeks. Except during the union that subsists between the young and the mother, till they are able to provide for themselves, quails are not naturally social. They are seldom seen in covies, nor do they collect together but on some powerful motive, such as emigration.

These birds usually sleep during the day, concealed in the tallest grass, and are so indolent, that a dog must absolutely run upon them before they will rise, and even when they are forced on the wing, they seldom fly far. They are easily drawn within the reach of a net, by means of what is called a quail-pipe. They are supposed to winter in Africa, and return

to this country early in the spring. Their flesh is highly esteemed.

Quails live on grain, which they procure chiefly by night, when they almost incessantly repeat their cry. The males are very pugnacious creatures, and were kept by the ancient Greeks and Romans, and are to this day by the Chinese, for the purpose of fighting, after the manner of game cocks.

THE COMMON BUSTARD.

Birds of the bustard kind have a bill somewhat convex, open oblong nostrils, long legs, naked above the knees, and only three toes, all of which are placed forward.

The common bustard is the largest land fowl which is a native of Britain, measuring nearly four feet in length, and in breadth nine. The head and neck are ash-coloured, the back is transversely barred with black and bright ferruginous, and the belly is white. On each side of the lower mandible is a tuft of feathers, about nine inches long. The female is only

about half the size of the male, and her colours are less bright.

The bustard delights in open and unfrequented countries, and is sometimes seen in Dorsetshire, on Salisbury Plain, near Newmarket, and on the Wolds of Yorkshire. It is of a timid and solitary disposition, runs swiftly, takes wing with difficulty, and therefore is commonly hunted with dogs. It feeds on seeds, herbage, and worms. The female makes a rude nest in the ground near some corn-field, lays two eggs, and sits thirty days. The flesh is highly esteemed. Under the tongue is the orifice of a sac or bag, in which this bird can carry about seven English pints of water, which serves as a reservoir against thirst,

THE PIGEON TRIBE.

PIGEONS form the connecting link between the poultry and the sparrow tribes. Some one or other of the species are dispersed, over most parts of the world. Their principal food is grain; they drink much, and associate in pairs. The female lays two eggs,

from which generally a male and a female are produced. They usually breed several times in the year; and the parent birds divide the labour of incubation, by sitting alternately on the eggs.

THE COMMON PIGEON.

This bird being the original of all our domestic varieties, is called the stock dove. It is still found wild in many parts of our island, forming its nest in the holes of rocks, old towers, and in the cavities of decayed trees. The body is ash-coloured, the upper part of the neck is of a shining green, on the wings there is a fillet, and the tip of the tail is blackish. On the approach of winter, this bird migrates from its more northerly summer retreats, and again retires, except a few that breed with us in the spring.

THE DOMESTIC PIGEON.

Like all creatures which have long been reclaimed, the domestic pigeon varies

very much in colour. It breeds generally nine or ten times in the year, producing two each time, the one a male and the other a female. The parent birds incubate by turns, feeding their young by bringing up the grain which they have taken into their crops, after its having been macerated. The flesh is generally esteemed, but has been thought improper for melancholy persons,

There are upwards of twenty varieties, of which tumblers, jacobins, crop-pers, runts, turbits, and carriers, are the chief. The latter obtain their name from the circumstance of their conveying letters and small packets, from one place to another. Lithgow informs us, that a bird of this kind will carry a letter in forty-eight hours from Babylon to Aleppo, which usually employs a man thirty days: and some years ago, it was proved that a carrier-pigeon flew from Bury St. Edmunds to London, a space of seventy-two miles, in two hours and a half.

THE RING-DOVE.

In the ring-dove, the tail-feathers

are black, the quill feathers whitish on the exterior margin, and the neck white on the sides. It is the largest of British pigeons; builds its nest of dry sticks in trees, and after fourteen days hatching, its young are produced. In winter, ring-doves assemble in large flocks, and leave off cooing, which, however, they renew again, as soon as they pair in spring. It is probable, that the greatest part of them migrate, as they always appear most numerous in winter.

Grain is their usual food, as well as that of the other species, though they require a mixture of green vegetables. Attempts have been made to domesticate these birds, but they have always returned to their natural independence, as soon as they found an opportunity,



THE TURTLE-DOVE.

The back of the turtle-dove is a blueish grey, the breast flesh-coloured; the tail-feathers are white at the point, and a black spot and whitish lines appear on each side of the neck.

This is a very shy and retired bird,

breeding in thick woods, and making its nest in very high trees. Its attachment to its mate is proverbial; but though, when a male and a female have been brought up together in a cage, they have sometimes been found unable to survive the loss of each other, there is reason to suppose that, in a state of nature, they are less constant. Their note is plaintive and melancholy.

THE SPARROW FAMILY.

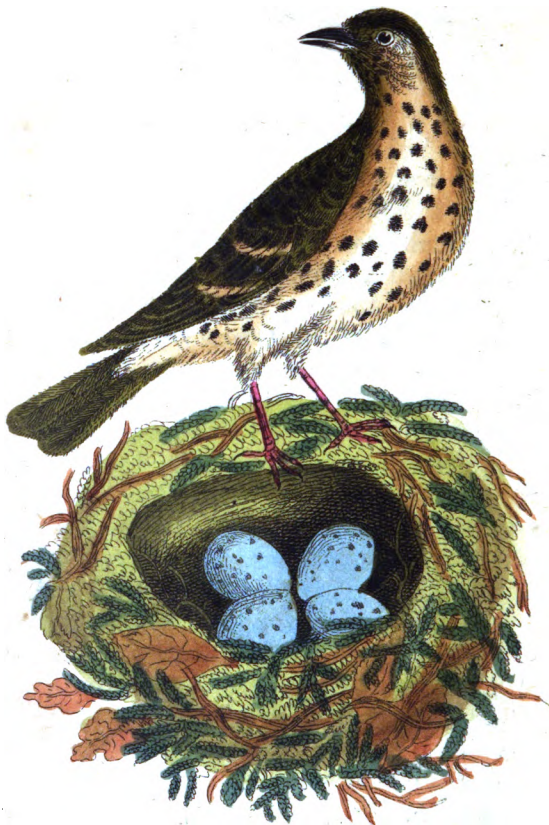
BIRDS of the sparrow kind comprehend all those families that lie between the thrush and the wren. They are a numerous and an active race, widely diffused over the globe, and remarkable for their beauty and powers of song. By their melody they enliven the most sequestered scenes; they haunt our gardens without fear, and, conscious of deserving favour, they live in the vicinity of man with some degree of confidence. Their principal food is insects and grain; and though some of them consume a considerable portion of the latter, they amply compensate for this, by the destruction they

make among the former. Their bills are conical, and pointed at the end.

THE STARLING.

This elegant and well-known bird is naturally very familiar, and therefore is easily trained to confinement. Its voice is not very captivating; but as it may be taught without difficulty to repeat short sentences, or to whistle tunes with great exactness, it is sometimes committed to the cage; and few of our readers will forget Sterne's starling, which was constantly repeating, "I can't get out;" thus at once expressing the misery of captivity, and giving a warning voice to avoid it.

In a state of nature, these birds collect in vast flocks during winter, and may be known at a great distance by their whirling mode of flight. They chatter much in the evening and morning, when they usually assemble and disperse; and so attached are they to society, that they will join the company of birds of a different species, rather than remain alone. In the fens of Lincolnshire, they collect in myriads,



Song Thrush

and break down the reeds with their weight. They feed principally on snails, worms, and insects, but have no objection to grain, seeds, and fruits. The female builds an artless nest of straw and small fibres in the hollows of trees, rocks, or old walls, and lays four or five eggs, of a pale, greenish ash colour.

THE MISSEL THRUSH.

This bird, which in Hampshire has received the appellation of the storm-cock, from its perching on lofty trees, and beginning its note sometimes before the new year, is the largest of British songsters. It feeds on holly and misletoe berries, as well as on insects, and may be considered as the sovereign of the grove; for it drives away from its haunts all the inferior species of the thrush kind. The writer of this has observed it on the top of a lofty leafless tree, pouring out its mellow notes before Christmas, in mild seasons, regardless of the wind, which caused it to dance as it were in the air.

THE COMMON THRUSH, OR THROSTLE.

Of all the thrush kind, this is the most accomplished singer: and as it sometimes breeds thrice a year, it frequently continues its note, for eight or nine months successively. It is the nearest rival to the nightingale; its song being a compound of several notes, which it combines with much skill, and continues for hours together.

The thrush is widely diffused over Europe, and is everywhere a favorite, on account of its voice. It is frequently caged, and, though its notes are less sprightly in confinement, it well repays the trouble of feeding and attending it. In some countries, it is caught for its flesh, which has been highly esteemed ever since the times of antiquity; though it appears that its flavour is considerably affected, not only by the nature of its food, but the season of the year.

THE BLACKBIRD.

This bird receives its name from the colour of its plumage, and possesses no

small reputation as a songster, though its note is too loud for any place but the groves. Nevertheless it is often tamed ; and from the faculty of its imitating the sounds of any musical instrument, it may be taught any combination of notes, which do not run into too great variety.

Unlike the thrush, it is a solitary bird, preferring woods and retired situations, and seldom congregating with its kind. It commences its song early in the spring, and continues it through part of the summer ; and after the moulting season, resumes it again during autumn. It feeds on worms and shelled snails ; the latter of which, in order to get at the animal, it breaks with great dexterity against the stones. In confinement it will eat crumbs of bread, and flesh raw or dressed.

The female breeds early in the spring, making her nest generally in some bush, in which she lays four or five eggs, which, after being hatched for about fourteen days, produce as many young.

On the Alps, and some other cold countries, the blackbird is frequently seen of a snowy whiteness. The species indeed is found in every climate,

and is remarkable for its shyness and timidity. When domesticated, however, it is found to be more restless than artful, more petulant than distrustful. If shut up in the same cage with other birds, it pursues and torments its fellow prisoners, and seems to take a pleasure in being rude.

THE BULLFINCH.

The bullfinch, which in its natural state has but two or three harsh notes, is so susceptible of improvement, that by a regular education, it becomes one of the greatest proficient in music. The female also, contrary to what prevails in other birds, is gifted with the powers of song. But the bullfinch may be taught to speak as well as to sing, in which case, according to Buffon, he utters his little phrases with such an air of discernment and penetration, that he appears as if animated by an intelligent principle. "I know a curious person," says the author of the *Ædonologie*, "who having whistled some airs quite plain to a bullfinch, was agreeably surprised to hear the bird add such graceful turns, that the master could scarcely recognize his



Bullfinch.

own music, and acknowledged that the scholar excelled him." It must, however, be confessed, that this bird will as readily acquire a vulgar as an elegant note. One, which had only heard car-
ters whistle, exactly imitated the coarseness of their manner.

But it is not only in docility that these birds excel ; they seem susceptible of personal attachment. They have been known, after escaping and living a whole year in the woods, to recognize the voice of their mistress, and to return to her protection. Others have died of melancholy, on being removed from the first object of their regard. They are likewise mindful of injuries received ; and though incapable of resenting them, evidently suffer from the recollection,

The bullfinch, during summer, chiefly frequents woods and retired places ; but in winter, approaches gardens and orchards, where it makes very free with the buds of trees, in search of insects. The female lays five or six eggs about the month of May, in a nest formed in some bush. She is easily distinguished from the male, whose superior brilliancy of colours is well known, parti-

cularly the rich crimson that adorns his cheeks and throat.



THE COMMON SPARROW.

No bird more frequently meets our eye than this, and if it does not charm the ear by its voice, it amuses the mind by its familiar impudence and craftiness. It frequents our habitations, and is seldom absent from our gardens and fields. Though its note is only a chirp, in a wild state ; when early reclaimed, it may be taught to imitate the strain of the linnet or goldfinch.

Few birds are more execrated by the farmers, and none perhaps more unjustly. It is true, indeed, they consume a considerable quantity of grain and fruit, but then it should be considered that a pair of them will destroy upwards of 3000 caterpillars in a week. Nor is the utility of these birds limited to this circumstance alone : they likewise feed their young with butterflies and other insects, which, if suffered to live, would be the parents of numerous caterpillars.

Early in the spring, sparrows build



Sparrow.

their nests, generally under the eaves of houses, or in holes of walls. When such situations, however, are difficult to be procured, they accommodate themselves with trees or any other safe retreat.

The affection of the parent birds to their young is very extraordinary. They will follow them a considerable way, if removed from the nest; and if any opportunity is left, will continue to supply them with food.

Linnæus repeats a story respecting sparrows, from Albertus Magnus, which, if he gave credit to himself, shews that he was occasionally too credulous for a philosopher. After having expelled a martin from her nest, in the eaves of a house, a sparrow took possession of it, and seemed to bid the other defiance. But the ejected bird soon revenged the insult, by assembling its companions, and plastering up the opening with dirt, leaving the invader and family to perish by hunger, in this miserable dungeon.

THE GOLDFINCH.

Of the finch kind there are several species, most of which are distinguished for their musical talents, but none of them are equal to the goldfinch in beauty of plumage, elegance of form, or harmony of voice. · Indeed, the red, the black, the white, and golden yellow, which so copiously adorn this bird, would render it the object of universal admiration, were it more uncommon, and more difficult to be procured.

Some naturalists have given the goldfinch the second rank among our singing tribes ; and, in point of beauty, it certainly deserves the first. It is much and deservedly esteemed for its docility, and the sweetness of its note, and is more commonly seen in a cage than any other of our British warblers. It is fond of orchards, and usually builds its elegant mossy nest in an apple or pear tree, where it lays five eggs. Towards winter it assembles in flocks, and feeds on various kinds of seeds, but shews a predilection for those of the thistle above any others.

Goldfinches are tamed with much

facility, and shew a peculiar aptness for receiving instruction. They are easily taught to perform several movements with accuracy: to draw up their water in small cups fastened to a chain, to fire a cracker, and other tricks which would appear unnatural for a bird to perform.

Some years ago, an Italian exhibited in this country the wonderful feats of goldfinches, and some other birds. One appeared dead, and was held up by the tail or claw, without manifesting any signs of life. A second stood on its head, with its claws elevated in the air. A third imitated a Dutch milkmaid going to market, with pails on her shoulders. A fourth mimicked a Venetian girl looking out at a window. A fifth appeared in military attire, and mounted guard as a centinel. The sixth was a cannoneer, with a cap on its head, a firelock on its shoulder, and a match in its claw, which it applied to a small cannon, and fired it. The same bird also affected to be wounded, was wheeled in a little barrow, as it were to the hospital; after which it started up, and flew away before the company. The seventh bird turned a

kind of windmill. And the eighth and last, stood in the middle of some fireworks, which were discharged all round it, without exciting a symptom of fear,

THE CANARY BIRD.

Though this bird is not originally a native of this country, but comes from the Canary islands, which still give it a name, it has so long been bred and domesticated in Europe, and is so frequently to be seen in the cage, that it unquestionably claims a place in this little work. It appears to have been first introduced into this quarter of the globe about the fourteenth century; but though they thrive perfectly under the protection of man, our climate is too cold to allow them to breed in a wild state, and therefore they are reared in houses with considerable care.

It is a fact, though not generally known, that the song of the canary bird is usually composed, either of the titlark or the nightingale's notes. Mr. Barrington saw two birds of this spe-



Canary Bird.

cies, which were imported from the Canary islands, that were destitute of any voice, and he was informed that this was no uncommon case. Most of the birds brought from the Tyrol, where immense numbers are reared, have been educated under parents, the progenitors of which were instructed by a nightingale. Our English canaries, however, have more of the titlark than the nightingale's notes; and by many, when in full song, are thought too loud for an apartment, in which people are sitting and conversing. The more general the conversation, the more the little warbler strains its throat, and drowns the human voice in its shriller modulations, which it continues for some time in one key, without intermission; then raises it higher and higher by degrees, with great variety of tones.

In Europe, the canary bird exhibits all that diversity of colouring which is usually the effect of long continued domestication. Like our common poultry, they are almost of every colour, white, mottled, and green; but in their native woods, they are of a dull and uniform green, and possess none of that

richness and variety of plumage, which are so much admired in our tame birds. Indeed they will intermix with the goldfinch, and some other birds of the same genus, and thus acquire colours and habits which do not belong to the pure breed ; but sterility marks this progeny, and nature returns to her regular course.

THE LINNET.

Though, in point of external beauty, the linnnet cannot be compared with the goldfinch or the Canary bird, by some its song is not less esteemed than their's. Indeed it is generally valued for its notes, and therefore frequently pays the price of admiration in captivity. In every state, it shews a particular predilection for the seed of *linum* or flax, from which circumstance it receives its name.

The linnnet usually builds in some thick bush or hedge, and lays four or five eggs. The young are hatched towards the latter end of April, or the beginning of May ; and if intended to be brought up tame, may be taken

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Linnets.



Sky Lark

from the nest at ten days old ; for at that period they will acquire any notes which are most familiar to their ears, and come within the compass of their throats. Yet the native voice of the linnet is so sweet, that little pleasure can be derived from superinducing strains foreign to its species, however much curiosity may be amused. Some fanciful persons have, however, attempted to teach it the use of speech, but it has never been known to make any great progress in this art, without long and unintermitted pains.

THE SKYLARK.

Of the lark family there are several species, but we shall only particularize two—the skylark and the wood-lark.

The skylark commonly forms its nest between two clods of earth, and lines it with dried grass and roots. In this she lays four or five eggs, and her period of incubation is about a fortnight, which office she generally performs twice a year. Her maternal affection is extremely interesting, both to the

eye and to the heart. When her young are callow, she may be seen fluttering over their heads, directing their motions, anticipating their wants, and guarding them against the approach of danger.

The instinctive attachment indeed of the female skylark to her offspring, often precedes the period when she is capable of being a mother. "A young hen bird," says Buffon, "was brought to me in the month of May, which was not able to feed without assistance. I caused her to be educated; and she was hardly fledged when I received from another place a nest of three or four-callow skylarks. To these strangers she contracted a strong liking; she attended them night and day, though nearly as old as herself, cherished them beneath her wings, and fed them with her bill. Nothing could interrupt her tender offices. If the objects of her regard were torn from her, she flew back to them as soon as she was liberated, and disdained to think of effecting her own escape, which she had frequent opportunities of doing, while they remained in confinement. Her affection seemed to deprive her of every concern

for self preservation; she neglected food and drink, and though now supplied the same as her adopted offspring, she expired at last, quite worn out with maternal solicitude. None of the young ones long survived her, but died one after another; so essential were her cares, which were equally tender and judicious to their preservation."

Early in the new year, the lark begins to sing, and continues her melody during the whole of the summer. It is chiefly, however, in the morning and evening that its strains are heard, and as it chaunts its mellow notes on the wing, it is the peculiar favourite of every person who has taste to relish the beauties of nature, at the most tranquil seasons of the day, particularly at dawn.

Up springs the lark,
Shrill-voic'd and loud, the messenger of morn.
Ere yet the shadows fly, he, mounted, sings
Amid the dawning clouds, and from their haunts
Calls up the tuneful nations.

The lark mounts almost perpendicularly, and by successive springs, into the air, where it frequently hovers over its nest, and the objects of its dearest

affections, at a vast height, without once losing sight of them. Its descent is in an oblique direction, unless when it is alarmed or attracted by its mate, when it drops to the earth like a stone. When it begins to rise, its notes are feeble and interrupted; but they gradually swell, as it ascends, to their full tone, and delight every ear that is enamoured of nature.

For nearly three months before Christmas, larks lose their voice, begin to assemble in flocks, grow fat, and are caught in prodigious numbers by the bird-catchers. As many as four thousand dozen have been taken in the vicinity of Dunstable alone, between September and February; nor are they less an object of pursuit in other districts; so that it is justly a matter of wonder that the species should still remain without apparent diminution. In Germany, such quantities of larks are caught that they are subjected to an excise duty, which, according to Keyserler, produces to the city of Leipsic, without noticing other places, no less a sum than about 900*l.* sterling a year.



Nightingale.

genuity to attempt to solve, but which we despair, in every case, of being able to comprehend or explain.

THE NIGHTINGALE.

From the earliest ages, poets have adorned their lays with descriptions of the vocal powers of this incomparable musician, and the admirers of sweet and varied modulations have listened to its notes with rapture. A bird thus universally celebrated, must unquestionably possess merits of no common order, and this is really the case. It is the song of the nightingale, and the season at which it rehearses it, that have given it such distinguished applause; it has neither beauty nor richness of colours, and is often admired without being seen. The upper part of the body, however, is of a rusty brown, tinged with olive; the under parts are of a pale ash colour, almost white under the throat and belly; and its whole length does not exceed six inches.

The nightingale visits England about the middle of April, and takes its de-

parture again, for the distant regions of Asia, as it is supposed, about the middle of August. It never migrates so far north as Scotland, or west as Cornwall and Wales. Even in districts where it is found, it seems to confine itself to particular spots, probably influenced by security, or the abundance of food. But though the climate of Sweden is more severe than that of any part of the British islands, Linnæus informs us it is not unknown in that country.

In England nightingales frequent thick hedges, and low coppices, and generally conceal themselves in the middle of some leafy bush. They commence their song in the evening, and continue it the whole night. Perhaps part of its fame, and certainly much of its effect, are owing to this circumstance. During the solemn stillness of the night, when other animals are at rest, every sound is heard to advantage, and produces a deeper impression. These vigils did not escape the notice of the Mantuan bard, who thus describes them :

As Philomel in poplar shades, alone,
For her lost offspring pours a mother's moan :

Which some rough plowman marking for his prey,
From the warm nest, unfledg'd, hath dragg'd away,
Perch'd on a bough, she all night long complains,
And fills the grove with sad repeated strains.

But independent of all combinations of time and place, so various, sweet, and continuous, are the notes of this bird, that the songs of other warblers, taken in their utmost extent, are insignificant compared to his. His variety appears inexhaustible; he never repeats the same note twice, without some change of key or embellishment. As often indeed as this leader of the feathered choir prepares to conduct the hymn of nature, he begins by feeble, timid, and indecisive tones, as if to try his instrument. By degrees he assumes more confidence, becomes gradually more warm and animated, till at last he captivates and overwhelms his audience, with the full exertion of his astonishing powers. Pliny has given an admirable description of these qualities of the nightingale, in recording the spirit of emulation which it displays in its song. Two of them, he observes, will continue to carry on an obstinate contest for victory, till the vanquished bird drops lifeless on the ground.

Indeed, though the nightingale is small, and apparently weak, its voice may be heard at the distance of almost a mile round his retreat. When tamed, he sings about nine months in the year, a proof that he is not solely prompted by love or duty, but by a natural instinct for melody. In a state of nature, however, he seldom sings above ten weeks in the year, and before he leaves off, his voice becomes more like the croaking of a frog than that of the tuneful Philomel we have described.

Nightingales may be taught to adopt the notes of any other bird, to sing by turns with a chorus, and to repeat their couplet at the proper time. A Cornish gentleman informed Mr. Bingley, that he had remarked of the nightingale, that it could modulate its voice to any given key, and that when a person whistled to it, the bird would immediately try to fall into unison. It may be even taught to articulate words. According to Pliny, the sons of the emperor Claudius had some nightingales which spoke Greek and Latin. But what he subjoins is perfectly incredible, namely, that these birds pre-



Redstart.

and back, are of a deep shining grey, and the breast is of a fine igneous red, while the wings are of a dusky black.

If taken young, this bird will acquire some degree of familiarity ; otherwise, though frequently a near neighbour to the human race, it still preserves its native wildness and timidity. It comes and goes to its nest without seeming to notice mankind, or at least without paying them any tribute, except that of fear. It never acquires the intimacy and confidence which distinguish the redbreast, it has none of the gaiety of the lark, or the emulation of the nightingale. In a word, its dispositions are melancholy, and its manners wild. When taken, after it arrives at maturity, it refuses every kind of food, and prefers death to captivity.

THE REDBREAST.

In every nation of Europe, there is a prejudice in favour of the redbreast ; and in this country it is not a little cherished and kept alive by the popular ballad of the "Children in the Wood," who after death, it is said, were care-

Eyes all the smiling family askance,
And pecks, and starts, and wonders where he is ;
Till, more familiar grown, the table crumbs
Attract his slender feet.

The female generally builds her nest in some concealed spot, by the roots of trees, and lays from five to seven eggs. It feeds on worms and insects during summer, but its food may be said to vary with the season, for nothing comes amiss to it, that is capable of supporting life. No bird is more active than this, and more satisfied with a smaller portion of rest. It is the first that appears at the break of day ; it is the last that retires in the evening to enjoy repose. The species is diffused from Norway and Sweden, to the coast of the Mediterranean.

THE WREN.

Of these birds we have three species, the common wren, the willow wren, and the golden-crested. The latter is the smallest of British birds, weighing no more than twenty-six grains. We shall restrict our description chiefly to the former.



The common wren, which is about four inches and a half long, and weighs only three drachms, frequents farm-houses and country villages, where it is seen hopping about full of vivacity, even in the midst of winter, and expressing towards evening its inward satisfaction, by cheerful and well-toned notes. It is frequently seen on stacks of fire-wood, or by the sides of old walls, into the holes of which it retreats like a mouse. It remains not, however, long concealed, but again appears, making quick and inconstant movements with its tail, which is always raised, nearly in a perpendicular direction.

The flights of this bird are short, but full of celerity, its wings moving with such rapidity as scarcely to be visible. The female builds a curious nest of an oval shape, very deep, with a small aperture in the middle for egress and regress, the external part consisting chiefly of moss, the internal of hair and feathers. She lays from ten to eighteen eggs, of a white colour, sprinkled with pale reddish spots. Ray justly observes, that it is one of those daily miracles which escape our obser-

vation, that a wren should produce so many young, and regularly feed each of them in total darkness. The young may be easily reared, if taken from the nest at fourteen days old, and fed with minced flesh.

The wren, notwithstanding its diminutive size, may be ranked among the finest of our singing-birds; and what gives it an additional claim to our regard, it remains with us all the year, and continues its melody throughout the winter, except during extremely severe frosts. In fact, it is almost the only one of the feathered race, that continues its warbling at a season, in which the general silence of the woods and groves is interrupted only by the croaking of ravens and the cawing of rooks. During a fall of snow, it exerts itself with peculiar effect, and always sings very late in the evening, though not after darkness has set in.

THE CHIMNEY SWALLOW.

Of all the feathered tribes, the swallow kind are most incessantly on the wing. Flight, indeed, seems to be their natural and almost their necessary

attitude; but what must ever render them still more interesting is the service they render mankind, by destroying myriads of insects, which would otherwise prey on the labours of industry; and that deep, and perhaps impenetrable veil which is thrown over their annual appearance and disappearance, at nearly stated periods, without our being able to ascertain with certainty where they retire, or how they dispose of themselves, during the season in which they are absent from us. On this subject there have been three different opinions formed, each of which has its supporters, namely, that they emigrate to warmer climates—that they lie torpid in caves, or other secure retreats—and that they plunge into the mud of ponds and lakes, where they continue under water in a state of insensibility, till the return of the spring, and the consequent reproduction of their insect food. The first opinion is most prevalent; the second is not without support from experience and observation; and the third, though it appears so wild and unnatural, has been defended with zeal. We will not take upon us to offer any decisive opi-

nion on this much-contested subject, but proceed to the history of the four species of swallows, which are known in this country.

The common, or chimney-swallow, generally appears in this country about the middle of April, and after a few weeks, begins building its nest in the insides of our chimnies, generally a few feet from the top. It lays four or five eggs, and has two broods every year, the second of which is produced about the middle of August.

The progressive steps by which the parent birds introduce their young into life, if it may be so called, are worthy of notice, as an admirable display of instinct. They first, but with some difficulty, raise them from the nest to the top of the chimney; there they feed them for a day or two, and when they have acquired sufficient strength to make another remove, they are conducted to the dead leafless bough of some neighbouring tree, where, sitting in a row, they are attended with great assiduity. In a few days more they are strong enough to fly, but are still incapable of catching their own food. They therefore play near the place

where the dam is watching for flies, and when she has collected a mouthful, at a certain signal the mother and nestling advance, rising towards each other, and meeting at an angle, the young in the meanwhile uttering a short quick note of gratitude and complacency.

The swallow acts as a centinel to other birds of the family, particularly to martins; for no sooner does it perceive the approach of a bird of prey, than it calls with a shrill alarming note all its own fellows and the martins about it, who pursue the enemy in a body, and buffet and harrass him, till he retires at a distance from the spot which it holds dear. This bird will also sound the alarm, and strike at cats when they venture on the roofs of houses, in the vicinity of a nest.

It is not always in chimneys that the swallow builds. It has been known to form its nest on the frame of an old picture, on the handles of a pair of garden-shears, on the back of a dead owl, suspended from the rafter of a barn, and even in a shell fixed in a proper situation to allure it. An owl, with the nest on its wings, and with

eggs in the nest, was brought as a curiosity to the museum of Sir Ashton Lever, and is now to be seen in that curious collection.

All the tribe have been observed to drink as they fly along, sipping the surface of the water; but in general the swallow alone washes on the wing, by dropping into a pool many times successively. The species now under consideration feeds on small beetles, as well as on gnats and flies, and frequently picks up gravel, which assists in grinding and digesting its food. Horsemen, on wide downs, are often closely attended by a small party of swallows for miles together, playing before and behind them, for the sake of the insects, which are raised by the trampling of the horses' feet.

Indeed, the number of insects destroyed by every single brood of swallows in the course of a summer, renders these birds the guardians of our corn, and entitle them to the same veneration, which in Egypt defends the Ibis, and in Holland the stork. Certain it is, we more frequently hear of unproductive harvests on the continent than in this country; and it may in

some measure be ascribed to a scarcity of swallows, which, in the markets of Spain, France, and Italy, are sold for food. In England we are not driven to such resources to furnish our tables, and it is only the wanton and the cruel who shoot swallows, and who therefore ought to be exposed to the censure of every thinking mind. Besides the inhumanity of starving whole nests by killing the dam, they who follow this barbarous amusement ought to reflect, that by every swallow they kill, they assist the effects of blasts, mildews, and vermin, in causing a scarcity of bread.

According to White, who made the most accurate observations on this tribe, swallows, before they disappear, forsake houses and chimneys, and roost in trees. They usually withdraw from public notice about the beginning of October, though some stragglers may be seen for a month longer. Before their actual disappearance, they assemble in vast flocks on house-tops, churches, and trees, from whence they take their flight.

THE MARTIN.

This species, called also the window swallow, makes its appearance soon after the swallow, and about the middle of May or the beginning of June, if the weather is fine, begins to repair its old nest, or to build a new one, generally under the eaves of houses, against which it sticks a fabric of mud and straw of a hemispherical form, with an aperture towards the top, which is capable of resisting the effects of the weather for years.

In this nest are produced four or five young, which when arrived at full growth, become impatient of confinement, and sit all day with their heads peeping out at the orifice, where the dam supplies them with food, till they are able to take wing, when they are fed as they fly for some time longer; but with such a rapid movement, that the quickest eye cannot discern all the steps of the process.

No sooner, however, is the first brood able to provide for themselves, than the parent birds set about preparing their nests for a second, while the excluded young congregate in vast

flocks, and may be seen on sunny mornings and evenings, clustering and hovering round towers and steeples, and on the roofs of churches and houses. These assemblies usually begin to take place about the first week in August, and are continued till the disappearance of the family.

The martin is often very capricious in fixing on a nesting-place, beginning many edifices and leaving them unfinished; but if it has once found a suitable situation, and formed a nest, it will occupy it for several successive years, and should it be demolished by accident or design, the bird will build again on the same foundation, nor can it be easily driven away.

This species is the least agile of all the British hirundines: their wings and tails are short, and therefore they are incapable of those surprising turns, and quick and glancing evolutions, which distinguish the chimney swallow. Their general motion is placid and easy in the middle region of the air, neither mounting to any great height, nor skimming long on the surface of the earth.

As the summer declines, the flocks

of martins daily encrease, from the accession of the second broods, till at length they swarm in myriads near the banks and aits of rivers and lakes. About the beginning of October, the greater part of them begin to disappear, though some have been seen here as late as the first week of November. Vast numbers of them annually perish, or are destroyed, the numbers that appear in the spring bearing no proportion to those that retired the preceding year.

The following anecdote proves, that the spirit of encroachment, among birds provokes enmity as among men. A gentleman, in North America, one morning heard a noise proceeding from a couple of martins that were flying from tree to tree near his dwelling. They made several attempts to get into a box or cage fixed against the house, and which they had formerly occupied. On observing their motions more particularly, it was found that a small wren came from the box, and perched on a neighbouring tree, making a very shrill noise. In a short time, however, she flew away, when the martins took possession of the box; but returning

in a short time she obliged them to decamp. This manœuvring continued the whole day, but next morning the wren quitting her lodging, the martins immediately occupied it, and using extreme industry and ingenuity, soon barricaded the entrance. The wren again presented herself, but could not procure admission; and the martins maintaining their post for two days, during which they abstained from food, the invader was obliged to raise the siege, and to leave them in quiet possession of the nest.

THE SAND MARTIN.

The sand-martin appears in this country soon after the swallow; but the species is not so numerous, nor so generally diffused. It frequents the banks of rivers and sand-pits, where it perforates a hole for its nest, about two feet in depth, but passing with a serpentine sweep, in a horizontal direction. At the further end of this burrow, it constructs a rude nest of grass and feathers, laying from four to six eggs.

“ Though one would at first be disinclined to believe (says Mr. White), that this weak bird, with her soft tender bill and claws, should ever be able to bore the stubborn sand-bank, without entirely disabling herself; yet with these feeble instruments have I seen a pair of them make great dispatch, and could remark how much they had scooped in a day, by the fresh sand which ran down the bank, and which was of a different colour from what lay loose, and had been bleached in the sun. In what space of time (continues he) these little artists are able to mine and finish their cavities, I have never been able to discover; but it would be a matter worthy of observation, where it falls in the way of any naturalist to make such remarks. This I have often taken notice of, that several holes of different depths are left unfinished at the end of the summer. To imagine that these beginnings were intentionally made, in order to be in the greater forwardness for the returning spring, is allowing perhaps too much foresight to a simple bird. May not the cause of these being left unfinished arise from the bird's meeting in those

with strata too hard and solid for their purpose, which they relinquish and go to a fresh spot that works more freely? One thing is remarkable—that after some years the old holes are forsaken, and new ones bored; perhaps, because the former habitations were become foul and fetid from long use, or because they so abounded with fleas, which pester this species to a great degree, as to become untenable?”

The facility with which the sand-martins work is really astonishing. The earl of Warwick having cut a new approach to his castle through a gritty rock, to the depth of nearly twenty feet, the very next year several birds of this kind had formed their nests in particular veins of the bank on either side, and appeared as much at ease, as if they had been denizens of the spot.

These birds do not appear to be of a very sociable disposition. Though they build together on account of the situation, they are never seen congregating in autumn. They flit about with the irregular motions of a butterfly, and are peculiar in all their habits.

THE SWIFT.

This species of swallow, called also the black martin, is by far the largest of the family: its feet, however, are so small, that it appears to use them with difficulty; but nature has amply provided it with the appendages of flight, and therefore it spends most of its time on the wing.

The swift visits us latest, and leaves us the earliest of any of the tribe, appearing about the beginning of May, and retiring about the middle of August. It breeds under the eaves of houses, in steeples, and other lofty buildings, forming its nest of grass and feathers. It breeds only once in the season, and produces no more than two at a time.

The activity of this bird is astonishing. In the height of summer, it will daily continue sixteen hours on the wing; and in sultry louring weather, it displays unusual energy and alertness.

In hot mornings, swifts collect together in little parties, and dash round the edifices which they frequent with very clamorous notes. These are sup-

posed to be the males; for the hens sit all day on the nest, and only snatch a few minutes before night sets in, to supply the wants of nature, and to relieve their weary limbs.

Just before they retire, large groups of them assemble high in the air, screaming and shooting about with wonderful rapidity. Indeed, they feed and fly higher than any other species: they also range to vast distances, as flight to them is merely pastime.— Sometimes, however, they may be observed hawking very low, for hours together, over pools and streams, in search of cadew-flies, may-flies, and dragon-flies. They will even pursue and strike at birds of prey that are sailing about in the air; but though their powers are greater, they express less animosity on such occasions than the other branches of their family.

The early retreat of the swift is wholly unaccountable: not a straggler is to be seen on the 20th of August; and what is still more extraordinary, they disappear even sooner in the most southerly parts of Andalusia, where a defect of food or of heat cannot be supposed to influence their motions. It

is therefore probable that they all lie torpid in the country that produces them; and in confirmation of this opinion, we learn from good authority, that in February 1766, a pair of swifts were found adhering by their claws, and in a torpid state, under the roof of Longnor Chapel, in Shropshire, which revived on being brought to the fire.

THE GOATSUCKER.

This curious bird, which is more frequently heard than seen, is nearly allied to the hirundines, and may properly be called a nocturnal swallow; for so great is the sensibility of its organs of sight, that it seldom appears by day, and seems to have no enjoyment, except under an obscure or a dark sky.

This bird makes but a short stay in Britain, as it does not appear till the end of May, and takes its departure about the middle of August. It feeds on night insects, which are abundant, during its continuance with us; and in order to catch them with more certainty, it flies with its mouth open,

while nature has furnished it with a glutinous substance to prevent their escape.

From its flying with its mouth open, arises that continual buzzing noise which the goatsucker makes while chasing its prey. When it settles on any small building, its notes will give a sensible vibration to the whole fabric. It also sometimes emits a kind of squeak, repeated four or five times; but this seems the voice of dalliance with its mate.

This bird makes a very artless nest in the ground, and lays two eggs. Should her young be discovered, it is said she will roll them with her wings to some more secret place.



THE HERON.

The heron is one of those birds that connect the land with the water tribes, and belongs to the natural family of *waders*, which all agree in their manner of life—a state rendered miserable by toil and hunger. The very appearance of the heron, indeed, to adopt the sentiments of Buffon, presents the

image of suffering, anxiety, and indigence. It appears thin and cadaverous, and if it occasionally feasts like a glutton, it frequently performs the penance of a long fast. It is probable, indeed, that nature has endowed it with the powers of supporting extreme abstinence, when there is a scarcity of food, as well as given it a most voracious appetite, when supplies are to be procured.

The heron, which measures upwards of three feet in length, is pretty common in the British islands. The feathers of the head are long, and form an elegant crest on the male, but the female is destitute of this appendage. The legs are long, and the prevailing colour of the plumage is a blue grey.

Of all known birds, the heron is the most formidable enemy to the scaly tribes. In fresh water, there is scarcely a fish however large, that it will not strike at and wound, though unable to carry it off; but the small fry are its chief subsistence, which pursued by their more powerful fellows of the deep into shallow waters, find there a still more formidable foe in the heron, who devours them without mercy. He

generally wades as far as he can go into the water, and there patiently waits the approach of his prey, into which he darts his long bill, with unerring aim, as soon as it is within his reach. Willoughby informs us, that he has seen a heron with no fewer than seventeen carps in his belly at once; and these, if undisturbed, he would digest in six or seven hours, and then resume his vocation of fishing. "I have seen," continues he, "a carp taken out of a heron's belly, nine inches and a half long. Some gentlemen, who kept tame herons, in order to try what quantity one of them would eat in a day, have put several smaller roach and dace in a tub; and they have found him consume fifty, one day with another. In this manner, a single heron will destroy three thousand store carps in a year."

Though this bird usually catches his prey by wading into the water, he will sometimes seize it on the wing in shallow streams, and pin it to the bottom. But no sooner has he laid firm hold of it, than he rises on the wing while it is yet struggling in his bill, and flying to

the shore, swallows it whole, and then hastens to his former station.

But notwithstanding his size and powerful beak, the heron is constantly haunted with fear. He flies not only from man, but also from the smallest of the falcon tribes. When pursued by rapacious birds, he tries to escape by mounting aloft in the air; and the struggle between him and his pursuers continues for the ascendant, till both are lost in the regions of the clouds. From this circumstance, herons were formerly considered as birds of game, and hawking them was a favourite amusement of our ancestors. Hence, a penalty of twenty shillings was incurred by any person who destroyed their eggs. Their flesh too, in former times, was held in some estimation, and valued at an equal rate with that of the peacock. It France it is still eaten, when young.

During the season of incubation, herons unite together in societies, and build in the highest trees. Their nests are made of sticks, and lined with a few rushes and wool, or feathers. Each contains four or five eggs, of a pale green colour.

When taken young, herons are easily tamed, but when old they refuse all food in captivity, and die of hunger.

THE BITTERN.

This bird, which belongs to the heron tribe, is distinguished from all others by its dismal hollow noise, somewhat resembling the interrupted bellowing of a bull, but more solemn and loud, and is not unfrequently heard at the distance of a mile. The bittern, however, is not so large as the heron, and its bill is weaker. It has a kind of pendent crest, and the prevailing colour of the plumage is a pale dull yellow, variously marked with black.

This is a very solitary bird, and is chiefly found among the reeds and rushes of extensive marshes, where it is equally hid from the fowler, and the prey for which it lies in wait. It continues for whole days about the same spot; and when it changes its abode in autumn, it always commences its journey about sunset, in order that its motions may be concealed.

During the summer season, it subsists on fish and frogs, but in autumn it

resorts to the woods in search of mice, which it seizes with great dexterity, and swallows whole.

When wounded it often makes a bold resistance, both to dogs and men, and when caught, it exhibits much rancour, striking viciously at the eyes of its antagonist. It is never the aggressor, except against its immediate prey; but if once attacked, it fights with the greatest intrepidity. Sometimes it turns on its back, and like the rapacious birds, fights both with its bill and claws, and in this posture has been known to drive off the most determined dogs.

About February and March, its loud booming note may frequently be heard in the mornings and evenings, several times repeated, and after an interval of silence, renewed. Harsh and dissonant as it may appear to us, this is no doubt the call of love, and is supposed to be produced by a loose membrane, situated at the divarication of the trachea, which can be distended with air, and exploded at pleasure. This noise was formerly believed to be made from plunging its bill into a reed, or rather into the mud; hence Thomson says,

So that scarce

The bittern knows his time, with bill l'ingulph'd
To shake the sounding marsh.

The female builds her nest among rushes, in April, and lays four or five eggs, on which she sits twenty-five days. After the young are excluded, the parent bird feeds them with snails, small fish, and frogs, for twenty days at least; by which time they begin to acquire sufficient strength to provide for themselves.

About the time of Henry VIII. the bittern was esteemed a delicious dish at the tables of the great. Its flesh has much the flavour of hare, and is by no means unpleasant. It is therefore still the object of pursuit by the sportsman, and of acquisition by the luxurious. The hind claw was formerly considered as a grand preservative for the teeth, and was often set in silver, and used to pick them.

THE WOODCOCK.

The woodcock is a bird very generally diffused over the temperate and cold climates of the world. Those that

visit us, during summer, are inhabitants of Norway, Sweden, Lapland, and other northern countries, where they breed; but as soon as the frost sets in, retire southwards. They arrive in Great Britain in flocks, according to the nature of the season, from October to December; and generally taking advantage of the night, make good their landing after sun set, that they may have time to disperse before the return of morn. On their arrival, however, in bad and stormy weather, they are often so exhausted as to allow themselves to be seized by the hand, on their first touching the ground.

Woodcocks live on insects and worms, which they search for with their long bills, in soft and moist situations, particularly in the woods. They feed and fly chiefly in the night, and after satisfying the demands of nature, return to their usual retreats.

After pairing, which takes place about the end of February, or the beginning of March, by far the greater part of these birds migrate again to the north. They first approach the coasts, and if the wind be favourable, they immediately set out; but should they

happen to be long detained by adverse gales, they fall an easy prey to sportsmen. The instant, however, a fair wind springs up, they seize the opportunity, and where hundreds have been seen one day, not a single bird is to be found the next.

A few, which have probably been unable to undertake the annual journey, remain and breed in this island. These form their nests on the ground, generally at the root of some tree, and lay four or five eggs, of a rusty colour, marked with brown spots. During the period of incubation they are remarkably tame, and will submit to be stroked by the hand rather than desert their charge.

From the progress of cultivation, woodcocks are observed to be becoming gradually more scarce in England; to the great concern of the sportsman, as well as of the epicure. A woodcock, indeed, is a very delicate morsel, being always dressed with the intestines, which give an additional relish to the flesh; yet in the north of Europe, we are told, the inhabitants esteem it unwholesome, from the circumstance of its having no crop. To the sportsman,

who frequently enjoys destruction for its very sake, rather than for its fruits, and therefore may appear less excusable in the eyes of humanity, the woodcock furnishes a successive link to his pastime, after grouse and partridge shooting are past. It is generally raised from the woods and coppices, by means of spaniels trained for the purpose ; when the bird, after clearing the tops of the bushes in a perpendicular direction, generally flies oblique and zig zag, which gives the gunner an opportunity of using all his skill and address in taking aim.

Nearly allied to the woodcock is the **SNIFE**, which frequently breeds in the more northern districts of this island, though the species partly migrates. Its flesh, its habits, its manner of feeding, and the amusement it furnishes to sportsmen, bear a strong resemblance to the woodcock, and therefore a particular description will be needless.

THE RUFF.

This bird is the most remarkable of any belonging to the sand-piper genus, of which we have thirteen species in

Britain. The female is called a reeve, and varies considerably from the male, both in colour and size. The ruff, which is about twelve inches long, receives its appellation from a series of long feathers on the back part of the head and neck, standing out somewhat like the ruff worn by our ancestors; but the bird does not acquire this appendage till the second year, and his mate wholly wants it. The males, however, appear to be most numerous, and this occasions fierce contentions among them at the pairing season, for companions. A general battle commences as soon as a female arrives in sight; and the fowler seizing the opportunity, frequently spreads his nets over the frantic combatants, and catches them in great numbers.

Ruffs and reeves are birds of passage, though it is not known, with certainty, where they spend the winter. They arrive in the fens of Lincolnshire, and other places on the north coast, in great numbers, every spring. According to Pennant, above six dozen have been caught in a single morning in one net, and a fowler has been known to obtain to his own share, forty

or fifty dozen in a season. The flesh is much admired.

The female lays four eggs in a tuft of grass, about the beginning of May, and the young are produced in about a month after.

THE LAPWING.

This beautiful and interesting bird, which in some counties obtains the appellation of peewit, from the sound of its voice, during summer, is found in most parts of Europe, and in winter is to be met with in Persia and Egypt; though we will not take upon us to assert that it migrates from us to those countries.

It generally makes its appearance in meadows and marshy grounds, in March, and in some places it is so numerous, that the fields echo with its plaintive notes. It has a beautiful tuft of feathers on the hind part of the head; and its form and motions are alike elegant.

The lapwing has a singular method of collecting its food, which consists principally of worms. It observes the

small swell of the ground which the worm makes, by employing itself in the morning. This it opens with its bill, and then beats the surrounding soil with its foot. By this motion, small as it may appear, the worm is brought to the surface, and instantly devoured by the vigilant bird. On the approach of night, it has still an easier mode of procuring its food. At that season, worms generally rise above ground; when the lapwing, walking leisurely on the grass, feels, and seizes its prey without exertion.

The female makes an inartificial nest of dry grass, in the vicinity of some pool or marsh, and lays two eggs. She sits three weeks, and the young are able to run about, within two or three days after they are hatched. To them the parent bird shews the tenderest attachment, and practises the most sagacious arts to allure boys or dogs from the spot where they are running. She does not wait the arrival of the danger she dreads, but boldly faces it, rising at once from the ground with a loud screaming, as if just flushed from hatching, though perhaps a hundred yards from the nest, and wheeling round and

round with great clamour and apparent anxiety, till the object of alarm is allured to a sufficient distance. When the enemy is very near, she affects to be altogether unconcerned, and her cries cease in proportion as her fears are encreased. When disturbed by dogs, she flies heavily before them, as if maimed, still vociferous, and still bold, but never looking towards the quarter where her young are stationed. The dogs pursue in expectation of catching the parent every moment: but no sooner has she drawn them off, than she leaves her astonished pursuers to gaze at the rapidity of her flight.

The following lines well describe the manner of this bird :

Hence, around the head
Of wand'ring swains, the white-wing'd plover
wheels
Her sounding flight ; and then directly on,
In long excursion, skims the level lawn,
'To tempt him from her nest,

The subsequent anecdote exhibits the domestic qualities of the lapwing, in an interesting light. A clergyman having put two lapwings into his gar-

den, one of them died soon after, and the other continued to pick up such food as its inclosure supplied, till winter came on. Necessity soon drove it to seek provisions from the house, and being gradually familiarized with the servants who threw it something to eat, it at last ventured into the kitchen, where a dog and cat kept regular residence. The good will of these, however, it so entirely conciliated by its winning manner, that it constantly resorted to the fireside as soon as it grew dark, and spent its evenings with them, sitting close by them, and partaking of the comforts of the warmth. With returning spring it forsook its winter quarters, and betook itself to the garden ; but when winter resumed its sway, it had recourse to its old shelter and friends, and met with a cordial reception. Satiety at length produced insolence, what was at first regarded as a favour, was in process of time snatched as a right. It frequently amused itself with washing itself in the bowl which was set for the dog to drink out of ; and while thus employed it shewed marked indignation, if either of its companions presumed to interrupt it.

At last this domestic bird died in its asylum, being choaked with something that it had inadvertently picked up from the floor, and attempted in vain to swallow.

THE WILD SWAN.

The wild, or whistling swan, is smaller than the tame species, from which it appears to be distinct, and is a native of the northern regions, never appearing in England, except before severe weather, when small flocks of them may be seen passing southwards. According to Martin, numbers of wild swans resort to Lingey, one of the Hebrides, about October, and continue there till March, when they migrate northwards to breed. A few remain all the year in Mainland, one of the Orkneys, and rear their young in the aits of the fresh water lochs; but the principal part retire at the approach of spring. Their quitting the isle is said to presage fine weather, and their arrival the reverse; hence they have obtained the appellation of the "Countryman's Almanack."

In Iceland, wild swans are an object of chace, particularly in the month of August, when they are incapable of flying from the loss of their feathers, At that season, the natives pursue them with dogs and horses, and catch vast numbers.

There are several specific differences between this and the tame swan, but the most remarkable one is the singular form of the windpipe, which, falling into the chest, turns back like a trumpet, and afterwards makes a second bend to join the lungs. By this construction of that membrane, the bird is enabled to utter a loud and shrill note, when flying or calling ; whereas the tame swan is the most silent of the feathered race, and only hisses when provoked.

It was evidently, therefore, from this species alone that the ancients derived their fable of the swan's possessing the powers of melody, and of singing its own *requiem* before its death. Besides, mute or tame swans never frequent the Po: and "I am certain," says Pennant, "that it was never seen on the Cayster in Lydia," each of them celebrated by the poets as streams

much resorted to by swans. At this time, the Icelanders compare its notes to the violin; they hear them at the end of a long and gloomy winter, when the return of the swans announces a more genial season; and fancy combining its voice with the spring to which it is a prelude, finds in it a melody it would not otherwise possess.

THE TAME SWAN.

This species, which is always mute, is not always domesticated. It is found wild in Russia and Siberia, but they are more commonly half reclaimed in the more temperate latitudes of Europe. They are principal ornaments of the artificial waters and lakes of our nobility and gentry, and they are seen in great plenty in the Thames, where they are accounted private property, and it is accounted felony to steal their eggs. And in the reign of Edward IV. a person, who did not possess a freehold of the clear yearly value of five marks, was prohibited from keeping a swan.

Nothing can exceed the beauty and elegance with which this bird rows

itself along, particularly before spectators, when it assumes the utmost grace and dignity.

Amid the reeds that fringe the lake,
Behold the swan with snowy wing,
Her innate pride of form awake,
And welcome love-creative spring.

On land, however, the swan makes a very awkward appearance; its gait is peculiarly inelegant, and all its motions are constrained; but in the water it will swim faster than a man can walk; and it possesses such strength, that it will throw down and trample upon a person of ordinary strength, particularly if he exhibits any symptoms of fear. A single stroke from the wing of an old swan is sufficient to break the leg of a man; and we are told that a female, during the period of incubation, perceiving a fox swimming towards her from the opposite shore, instantly darted into the water, and having kept him at bay a considerable time with her wings, at last succeeded in drowning him; after which she returned in triumph to her nest, in the sight of several persons. In fact, it will not brook an intruder on its domain.

All naturalists agree in assigning the swan a great degree of longevity, though this fact has not been exactly ascertained. The period of three hundred years, however, allotted it by vulgar belief is doubtless an exaggeration; but it appears extremely probable that it will live for a century. The flesh of the old birds is hard and ill-flavoured; but that of the young, called cygnets, was once highly esteemed, and is still used by the corporation of Norwich at their public dinners; and, if we mistake not, they are bound by some tenure, to present the Duke of Norfolk, annually, with an immense cygnet-pie.

Formerly, there was a noble swannery at Abbotsbury, in Dorsetshire, the property of the earl of Ilchester, where between six and seven hundred birds were kept, but the collection is now much diminished. When the royalty, however, belonged to the abbot, before the dissolution of the monastery at that place, it was frequently much more numerous than what we have stated.

In February, the female swan makes a nest of grass among the reeds, and lays about eight or nine eggs, which

she hatches for six weeks, and the young are two years before they attain their proper size and colours. For some months, they are protected and supplied with the tenderest care; but when they are able to provide for themselves, the old males drive them away. Thus expelled from their family, the cygnets unite in small companies by themselves, and do not separate till they, in their turn, feel the calls of nature prompting them to rear families of their own.

THE GOOSE.

This island produces various species of geese; which it would be uninteresting to our young readers in general to enumerate; but the common wild goose and the tame are only varieties of the same species, though their different habits deserve consideration.

The wild goose is commonly found in the fens of this country: it breeds in Lincolnshire and Cambridgeshire, and produces seven or eight young at a time, which are easily domesticated, if taken early from the nest.

These birds are frequently seen flying at great heights, in flocks of from fifty to an hundred, particularly when the cold of the north drives them to seek a more southerly situation. In such expeditions, they seldom rest by day, and their cry is frequently heard, while from their distance above they are imperceptible. This is probably the note of mutual encouragement, as they seldom exert it when they alight in their journies. Their flight is conducted with great regularity: they always proceed, either in a line abreast, or in two lines joining in an angle in the centre. In this order, they generally take the lead by turns, the foremost, when tired, falling into the rear, and the next in rank succeeding to his duty.

On the ground, too, they always arrange themselves in a line, and seem to descend for rest rather than for refreshment. At least we may presume so; for, after having continued in this situation for an hour or two, one of them, with a long loud note, gives the signal for the rest to rise, which is instantly obeyed with promptitude and alacrity.

The tame goose, as has been already remarked, is nothing but this species in a reclaimed state. It is common, round the farms and cottages of most parts of this country; but is no where so plentiful as in Lincolnshire, where many thousands are kept for the sake of their quills and feathers.

Cruel as the practice may appear, and painful as it undoubtedly is, these poor birds are stript alive once in the year for their quills, and no fewer than five times for their feathers. The first plucking for both commences about Lady-day, and the other four take place between that term and Michaelmas. Should cold weather set in immediately after this barbarous operation, great numbers are killed by it; but independent of this, habit reconciles them to endure it with patience, if not without suffering. Old geese submit quietly to what they know from experience is unavoidable, but the young ones are noisy and turbulent. Pennant says, he once saw this business performed, and that even goslings of six weeks old did not escape, for their tails were plucked, as he was told to inure them early to the custom. In

other respects, the owners of the geese treat them with great attention and kindness, frequently lodging them in the same apartment with themselves.

These geese, which are obliged to submit to repeated pluckings, breed only once a year; but such as are at liberty to wear their covering till nature divests them of it, and at the same time are well fed, generally hatch twice in a season. During the period of incubation, the Lincolnshire gooseherds take abundant care of their charge, place them in rows in wicker pens one over the other, and drive them twice a day to water. On their return, they replace each bird on her proper nest, without committing the smallest mistake; though a stranger would find it difficult to distinguish between one and another.

Both the goose and the gander shew a strong affection for their young, and will defend them with great resolution. Indeed, though it is simple in appearance, and awkward in gesture, this bird is not without many marks of sentiment and understanding. It is even capable of gratitude and attachment to its benefactors, of which the

following relation, communicated to Buffon by a person of veracity, gives ample proof.

It appears, that the gentleman referred to, had two ganders and three geese. The two ganders, as is commonly the case, were rivals, and one of them distinguished by the name of Jacquot, being inferior in strength, was more than once in danger of his life from the fury of his adversary, had he not been saved by the active interference of his owner. The poor bird was so sensible of this, that he attached himself to his preserver with the utmost tenderness, seemed to claim his protection whenever he felt it to be wanted, and evinced so much gratitude, that we find it necessary to allow his master to speak in his own words, in order to gain credit to the recital.

“When my friend Jacquot,” says he, “saw himself master of the three females, by the discomfiture of his rival, in which I assisted, he would not venture to leave them for a time, but only gave me at a distance many passing tokens of his friendship, by shouting and clapping his wings.—

Things went on in this way till the breeding season: and when his females began to sit, and he was no longer in fear of a rival, he redoubled his attentions to me. One day, having followed me as far as the ice-house at the top of the park, the spot where it was necessary to part with him, in pursuing my way to a wood at half a league distance, I shut him in the park. No sooner, however, did he find himself separated from me, than he vented strange cries, which I passed on without regarding. But before I had advanced above a third of the way, the noise of a heavy flight made me turn my head, when I saw my Jacquot only four paces behind me. He followed me all the way, partly on foot, partly on wing, getting before me, and stopping at the cross-paths to mark the road I meant to take. Our journey lasted from eight in the morning till ten at night; and my companion followed me through all the windings of the wood without seeming to be tired. After this adventure, he attended me every where, and in fact began to grow troublesome; for I was not able to go

to any place without his tracing my steps, so that one day he even entered the church, and found me. Another time, as he was passing by the rector's window, he heard me talking in the room, and as the door happened to be open, he walked up stairs without ceremony, and marching in, gave a sudden and loud scream, to the no small affright of the family.

“Sorry I am, in relating such interesting traits of my good and faithful friend Jacquot, to be obliged to confess that it was myself who dissolved this singular connection. The fact is, a separation became necessary. Jacquot fancied himself as free in the best apartments as in his own; and after several unpleasant circumstances of this nature, I ordered him to be shut up, and saw him no more. He lived about a year in this state of seclusion and inquietude, and at last died of chagrin. I was told that he became at last as dry as a bit of wood, for I did not venture to visit him; and his death was concealed from me for more than two months. Were I to recount all the instances of attachment displayed by this poor bird, it would

occupy too much of my time, and tire your patience. He died in the third year of our friendship, and in the eighth year of his age."

THE DUCK.

There are no fewer than ten varieties of the tame duck, and about double that number of the wild, between which the most obvious distinction is, that the wild ducks have yellow feet, and the tame black.

The common species of tame ducks derive their origin from the mallard, and may be traced to that fowl by unerring characters, namely, by the four middle feathers of the tail, which are black, and strangely turned up. Amid all that variety with which nature sports, in the colours of tame fowls, the common drake still retains this mark, demonstrating his affinity to those ancestors from which he originally sprung.

Tame ducks are reared with more facility than most other domestic animals. The very instinct of the young direct them to their favourite element;

and though they are frequently hatched and conducted by hens, they contemn the admonitions of their step-dames; thus evincing, that all birds receive their manners rather from nature than education.

The hen, indeed, is found by experience to be a better foster-mother than the duck, which often leaves her eggs till they become corrupted; and should she perform the duty of incubation properly, she is afterwards very negligent of her charge, and seems to think, that by leading them forth to the water, she has made sufficient provision for them. On the contrary, the hen is an indefatigable nurse, even when rearing a spurious brood, and generally produces a duckling from every egg with which she is entrusted, while she attends to the young with the most painful solieitude; and when the young ducks, following instinct, take to the water, she uses every effort to recal them, and to preserve them from what she considers as destruction.

Tame ducks are extremely beneficial to mankind, and by no means expensive, in proportion to the quantity of food they yield when killed. They

subsist on scattered corn, worms, snails, and other insects; and annually lay a great number of eggs, which are scarcely inferior to those of the hen.

Wild ducks, from which our domestic breed is unquestionably derived, frequent the marshy grounds in many parts of this island, where they breed; but are no where so plenty as in Lincolnshire, where prodigious numbers are annually taken in the decoys, and sent to the London market. In ten decoys only, in the vicinity of Wainfleet, upwards of thirty thousand have been caught in a season. Their flesh is highly flavoured, and always fetches a good price among the epicures of the metropolis and other parts of the kingdom.

Pennant, who enjoyed the best opportunities of procuring information on the subject, gives the following account of the mode by which wild fowl, particularly of the duck kind, are caught in Lincolnshire.

“A decoy (says he) is a pond, generally situated in a marsh, so as to be surrounded with woods or reeds, and if possible with both, to prevent the birds which frequent it from being

disturbed. In this pond the birds sleep during the day; and as soon as the evening sets in, the decoy *rises*, as it is termed, and the wild fowl feed during the night. If the evening is still, the noise of their wings during flight is heard at a great distance, and is a pleasing though somewhat melancholy sound. The decoy ducks (which are either in the pond-yard, or in the marshes adjacent: and which, although they fly abroad regularly, return for food to the pond, and mix with the tame ones that never quit the pond) are fed with hemp-seed, oats, and buck-wheat. In catching the wild birds, hemp-seed is thrown over the skreens, to allure them forward into the *pipes*, of which there are several leading up a narrow ditch, that closes at last with a *funnel-net*. Over these *pipes*, which grow narrower from the first entrance, there is a continued arch of netting suspended on hoops. It is necessary to have a *pipe* for almost every wind that can blow, as on that circumstance it depends which pipe the fowl will take to. The decoy-man likewise always keeps to leeward of the wild fowl, and burns in his mouth or

hand a piece of *Dutch turf*, that his effluvia may not reach them; for if they once discover by the smell that a man is near, they all instantly take flight. Along each pipe are placed *reedskreens*, at certain intervals, to prevent him from being seen, till he thinks proper to shew himself, or the birds are passed up the pipes, to which they are led by the trained ducks (who know the decoy-man's whistle), or are enticed by the hemp-seed. A dog is sometimes used, who is taught to play backwards and forwards between the skreens, at the direction of his master. The fowl, roused by this new object, advance towards it, while the dog is playing still nearer to the entrance of the pipes; till at last the decoy-man appears from behind the skreens, and the wild fowl, not daring to pass by him, and unable to fly off on account of the net covering the hoops, press forward to the end of the funnel-net, which terminates upon the land, where a person is stationed ready to take them. The trained birds return back past the decoy-man into the pond, till a repetition of their services is required."

The usual season for catching wild ducks is from the latter end of October to February. Between the first of June and the first of October, there is a parliamentary prohibition against pursuing this profitable pastime.

Wild ducks are extremely artful birds. They frequently build their nests some distance from the water, and in this case the female will carry the young in her beak, or between her legs, to their native element. Sometimes they have been known to lay their eggs in a lofty tree, in a nest deserted by a magpie or a crow; and a duck's nest was once found at Etchingham, in Sussex, formed of small twigs laid across between the branches of an oak, at the height of twenty-five feet from the ground.

We are told, that at Bold, in Lancashire, during the summer-season, a great number of wild ducks used to frequent the ponds and moat near the hall, and that they were regularly fed by a man, who assembled them together, by beating with a stone on a hollow wooden bowl. They flocked round him with all the familiarity of tame ducks; and as soon as they had finished their repasts, they withdrew to their respective haunts.

The widgeon and the teal belong to this family, and the flesh of both is highly esteemed. The ancient Romans used to rear considerable quantities of teal in a domestic state, and it can scarcely be doubted that the practice would succeed with us, if due attention were paid to it.

The eider duck deserves to be incidentally named, on account of its down, which, from its superior warmth, lightness, and elasticity, is preferred to every other kind of plumage for beds and coverlets. This bird frequents the western isles of Scotland, but it is much more numerous in countries that lie still farther north.

THE CORMORANT.

To those who are only approaching the temple of nature, marine birds are seldom very interesting. Their filthy habits, their discordant notes, their general inaptitude for human subsistence when dead, and the little service they render mankind when alive, all conspire to render them of comparatively inferior importance among the feathered race, and to diminish our attachment

to them. We therefore hasten to draw this little work to a close, by furnishing a general idea of sea-fowl, in the history of the cormorant and the gannet.

The cormorant is nearly as large as a goose, though its body is more slender. The base of the lower mandible is covered with a naked yellow skin, extending under the chin, and forming a sort of pouch. The male is distinguished by a loose pendant crest on the head, by a white spot under the chin, and by a tuft of the same colour on the outside of each thigh. The plumage of the whole body is black, varying in certain aspects with glosses of green and blue.

The cormorant has been found by navigators in almost every part of the world; and its flesh, though extremely rancid, sometimes affords a desirable repast to the famished sailors. The most frequent residence of this bird, when on shore, is the high cliffs that in many places impend our coasts, particularly among the precipices of St. Kilda. There, to the spectator, at the height of three quarters of a mile above the surface of the sea, the vast

waves that roll between the old and the new world, appear like the curl raised in a lake by a gentle breeze. On these tremendous elevations, the roaring of the Atlantic is softened down to the gentle murmurs of a brook; and the cormorants, with myriads of other water-fowl that skim below, seem scarcely so large as swallows.

These birds are likewise pretty common round the high rocks of the Isle of Wight, where the sailors give them the ludicrous name of "Isle of Wight parsons." Wherever they are found, they build their nests on the highest part of the cliffs that hang over the sea, and lay three or four pale green eggs, about the size of those of a goose. During winter, they disperse along the shores, and visit the fresh waters, where they commit astonishing depredations among the scaly tribes. In fact, the cormorant is perhaps the most voracious of all birds, owing to the vast number of worms that fill its intestines, and accelerate the progress of digestion. Spurred on by an insatiable appetite, it dives into the sea like an arrow, and with such well-directed aim, that its prey seldom escapes. It

will sometimes remain under the water for a considerable time, but seldom appears above its surface without a fish crossways in its bill, which it tosses up into the air, and with remarkable agility seizes it by the head, before it can reach the water. In that position, by dilating its throat, it will swallow a fish apparently thicker than its neck.

In England, this bird was formerly domesticated, and trained to fish for the service of its owner. When thus employed, a ring was fastened round its neck, to prevent it from swallowing its prey; and as often as it caught a fish, it was instructed to carry it to its master. Even so late as the reign of Charles I. it appears, that there was an officer of the royal household, entitled Master of the Cormorants. In China, the inhabitants still avail themselves of the skill of the cormorant in fishing; and one person can manage a great number of them, which he carries out hooded upon the prow of his boat into a lake. On a signal given, they disperse over the expanse of the water; and each, according to his success, returns loaded to his master, who receives the booty, and again dispatches

him to his employment. When a sufficient quantity has been caught, the bird has its neck untied, and is either rewarded with a portion of the spoil, or sent out to fish on its own account. Indeed it is only hunger that gives activity to the cormorant; when glutted with food, it will remain for some hours without motion, in a state of listless apathy.

THE GANNET.

The gannet, or Soland goose, is almost peculiar to the British isles, and therefore deserves to be selected for description, from the numbers of sea-fowl that line our coasts. It is somewhat more than three feet in length, and six in breadth, and weighs about seven pounds. The whole plumage is of a dirty white, inclining to grey. The eyes are of a pale yellow, and full of vivacity, and surrounded with a naked skin of a fine blue. The bill is six inches long, and furnished with a pouch sufficiently large to contain half a dozen of herrings, its principal food, during the season of incubation. Gan-

nets are migratory, though the place of their retreat is not precisely known. They first arrive in Britain in the month of March, and their departure is in August or September, according as they have been more or less disturbed in the business of nidification, those whose nests have not been plundered, being always the first to migrate. Indeed, as they subsist almost entirely on herrings, it is probable that their arrival and departure are influenced by the motions of those fishes, which they are seen constantly attending, during their circuit of the British Isles. Hence, the gannet is extremely useful to fishermen, by indicating the tracks which the shoals of herrings pursue. Following its prey, it is sometimes seen on the Cornish coast, and as far south as the Mouth of the Tagus. It is excessively voracious; and allowing a single gannet to consume only five herrings a day, it has been computed that one hundred millions are destroyed by the birds of this species, inhabiting St. Kilda alone.

In the breeding season, gannets retire to the highest and steepest rocks that line the northern coasts. They

are found in vast numbers in the isle of Alisa, in the Frith of Clyde, on the rocks of St. Kilda, on the bass in the Frith of Forth, and on the Skelig isles off the coast of Ireland. During the months of May and June, the surface of those dreary precipices is almost entirely covered with nests, eggs, and young birds; they darken the very sky, and their screams stun the auditory nerves.

Gannets form their nests of grass, sea-plants, or any other substance that floats on the water. They lay only one egg in the year: but if that is removed they will produce a second, or even a third, rather than desist from their duty. During the first year, the young are of a much darker hue than the parent birds, and become very fat before they leave their nests. At that period, their flesh is held in considerable estimation, particularly by the natives of St. Kilda, who undergo the greatest dangers for its acquisition. Indeed the eggs and the flesh of the gannet constitute a principal support of the miserable natives of that sequestered spot, throughout the year, and they preserve them in small pyramidal

stone buildings, covered with ashes, to defend them from moisture.

In order to obtain their prey, the inhabitants climb the rocks frequented by the gannets, when this is practicable, passing along such narrow and precipitous paths as appal an ordinary beholder to contemplate. But when no dexterity can accomplish this, the fowler is lowered by a rope from the top of the cliff; and to take the young, often stations himself on the most dangerous ledges, ransacking all the nests within his reach, and then, by means of a pole and his rope, moving to other places to do the same, till at last he is drawn up with the spoil he has collected; and after a little respite sets out on a second expedition of equal peril. The very reflection chills us with horror, yet habit reconciles the natives to this adventurous task, and renders them insensible to the dangers that surround them. They will hang suspended in the air by a rope, sometimes two hundred fathoms from the ground, regardless of their situation, or of the raging sea below; and it may be truly said, that in their eager pursuit, to

obtain the means of living, they despise the fear of death.

A more easy and safe mode of catching the gannet, is by tying a herring to a board, and setting it afloat, when the bird darts so furiously upon it, that it breaks its bill in the wood, or breaks its neck. It has been known to strike its bill through an inch and a quarter plank; but this kind of trap is prohibited by a local regulation, where these birds most abound.

Here let us pause for the present. Enough, we hope, has been said on this beautiful class of animated nature, to invite our juvenile readers to accompany us in our further progress through tribes of being, which though perhaps less fascinating, are not less curious.

FINIS.

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